HIGH ADVENTURE IN TIBET

THE LIFE AND LABORS OF PIONEER MISSIONARY
VICTOR PLYMIRE

DAVID V. PLYMIRE
Mr. Plymire in Tibetan costume—complete with sword and upturned boots.
Acknowledgment

Due to my limited experience in writing it is doubtful whether this book could ever have materialized, except for the guiding hand of God, through whom able and experienced assistance was provided.

I am greatly indebted to the Rev. Leslie Smith who, in addition to his duties as lay-out editor of the Pentecostal Evangel, helped me prepare the manuscript. He has given unselfishly of his time and energy. I wish to express the deep appreciation I shall always have for his invaluable help.

—D.P.
Dedication

To my mother, who went with my father through the reign of terror and kept by his side through the many dark valleys. Advancing through storm, she experienced with him the tragedies and triumphs of missionary work in Tibet. Never complaining, she stood by him until the last—and saw him reach the final summit.
Forward

"A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" could very aptly describe the stalwart warrior of the cross, Brother Victor G. Plymire. Of the forty-eight years he devoted to foreign missionary work, thirty-six were occupied in lonely isolated service along the Tibetan border or inside Tibet.

For several years, during times of war and revolution, he lost contact with the outside world and was considered dead, only to appear very much alive. He had been laboring for the Master where no mail service or any other kind of communication was available.

Victor Plymire had a godly mother who offered him to the Lord at the age of two with the result that when he was sixteen he consecrated his life to his Saviour and Lord.

He possessed great stamina and drive, always active to the limit of his power. When public meetings were not practical or possible, he would stand at the door of his Tibetan home urging passers-by to come in
so that he might talk to them about the things of God.

To illustrate the difficulty of winning Tibetans to an open confession of Christ, it was sixteen years from the time Brother Plymire entered missionary service until he had the joy of baptizing his first convert.

He never wanted to give up. Even at seventy-five years of age, he still nurtured the hope that he might be permitted to resume foreign service among either the Chinese or Tibetans, and had suggested that he would like to go to Formosa. This was only because Tibet and China proper were closed to the gospel.

Brother Plymire won the confidence of many Tibetans. They knew him so well that one leading man, who was a tribal chief, wanted to enter into a blood covenant with him. This would have meant the literal mingling of the blood of the two men by cutting their wrists.

Prayer was not just a pastime with Brother Plymire for he knew it as a source of power and a medium for obtaining help in times of need. On many occasions in Tibet when his life was in great danger, through his own prayers and those of his friends a miraculous deliverance came. He endured hardship as a good soldier of Christ. His journeyings took him over high mountains where at times he sank to his waist in deep snow. At other times through the valleys he would trudge mile after mile through marshy ground, for long periods, often without food or water.

To some his resolute determination to adhere to that which he considered right made him seem austere. Nevertheless, he was most tender and solicitous to his wife and for his children's welfare, or any other person who might be in need. Victor Plymire fought
a good fight, and he kept the faith. He rests from his labors, and his works do follow him. We believe that in the great eternity before us there will be many from China and Tibet who will rise up to call him blessed.

NOEL PERKIN
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1. Mountains of Mystery

The mysterious, little-known land of Tibet lies high on the remote plateau of Central Asia. For centuries this strange country has stirred the curiosity of adventurers and romanticists, yet few have ventured to explore its forbidding and forbidden confines. Fewer still are those brave souls who, for the purpose of taking the gospel of Christ to an unloved, unknown and neglected people, have attempted the dangerous journey.

It is the mountains of Tibet which stand in a silent defiance of civilized man and his weak efforts to conquer them. Only the strongest have accepted the mute challenge of these peaks; only the completely fearless have attempted to discover what lies beyond these snow-clad, wind-swept summits.

Yet, behind the towering, formidable mountain walls of Tibet are the scattered villages of an untamed
and primitive people. Here is one of the few remaining places on the earth where modern civilization is a complete stranger. What strange cause has so effectively isolated this far-off region from the rest of the world?

The mountains, of course. But the mountains are only part of the answer. Far more mysterious than these glistening guardians of rock and ice are the forces of spiritual darkness which hide there. The powers of this darkness are very real to the Tibetans. It is a darkness too horrible to understand by the mere reading of these pages. Be he missionary or explorer, whoever climbs the Himalayas inevitably meets with this sinister force. Many a missionary has had to fight almost physical battles with it, faith in God his only weapon.

Missionary tales are sometimes doubted. It may be better to begin this one by relating the experience of a man who was not a missionary. Mr. Harrison Forman spent twenty years in the Orient, making several expeditions into the wilds of Tibet. With the kind permission of this noted explorer, author and foreign correspondent, the following account is retold here, as condensed in the December 1937 issue of the Readers' Digest.

I SEE THE KING OF HELL

(By Harrison Forman)

When disguised as a Tibetan sorcerer, I walked into the sacred forest of Radja Gonpa with Old Sherap, he was plainly frightened. If I were unmasked, his brother sorcerers might slay us both.

"If there be trouble," I promised him, "I assure
thee that I shall swear I have never seen thee before."

The sun was setting as we came into the clearing where, in a circle sat a score of sorcerers, silent except for an occasional whisper. As unobtrusively as possible we took our places in the circle, exciting little more than a momentary glance from the others. I could sense my old friend's sigh of relief. I studied the nearest sorcerer on my left. His face was ugly and dirty. His long snakelike coils of black hair looked as though they might be the nesting place for all manner of crawling things. His coal black eyes were intently fixed on nothingness as he sat in the clearing like one in a trance.

He and his fellows were followers of Bonism, a form of paganism which predates Buddhism in Tibet. The lamas of Buddhism intercede between the laymen and the benignant deities; the Nukhwas of Bonism propitiate the evil ones. It was the materializing of these evil spirits that I had come to see.

The rising wind of dusk rustled through the trees as though announcing the dread arrivals which we were expecting, and which I the skeptic, was sure would not come.

Then through an opening in the trees a tall man of impressive mien entered the clearing and mounted a tall boulder. It was Drukh Shim the Grand Wizard. Squatting crosslegged on the top, he faced us in silence, his piercing eyes apparently missing nothing that came within their range. I noticed that a human thighbone rested on the rock at his right hand. The top of a human skull at his left. For minutes there was deep silence while dark closed in. Then, as if at a given signal, though I saw none given, the sorcerers began to sway forward and backward, and in deep tones
spoke one word three times, "Yamantaka Yamantaka Yamantaka."

So, they called upon the King of Hell himself, to appear.

After the third repetition, the Grand Wizard lifted the thighbone to his lips. It was a horn and its low note rolled mournfully through the forest. Then he lifted the skull cup libation bowl. Old Sherap had prepared me for this and I knew the meaning of the solemn drinking. In ancient times they had held human sacrifices—and what the Grand Wizard now drank was human blood.

The Grand Wizard replaced the cup, and the sorcerers resumed their chanting. "Yamantaka Yamantaka Yamantaka."

Heads were bowed. I bowed mine, but out of the corner of my eye I watched them, alert for trickery, wondering how it would begin. I did not believe in daemons and devils, much less that they could be made visible to the eyes of men. It was my sincere intention to remain as much the scientific inquirer as possible through all of this ceremony.

Again the thighbone trumpet spoke, again Drukh Shim drank. Faster swayed the sorcerers. "Yamantaka Yamantaka Yamantaka."

Faster and faster I swayed and chanted with them. And something entered me—got into my blood. I do not know what that something was; but it was there. I began to be less the skeptic, more the Tibetan sorcerer I was pretending to be. I recognized this and began to rebel. I was not going to allow myself to be hypnotized into seeing something reason told me could not possibly be there.

I could be hypnotized, I knew that, and believed
that hypnotism would prove to be the answer to whatever happened in the Sacred Forest. But what form of hypnotism? Mass hypnotism? Should we all see things created out of the mind of someone else? Or should we be subjected to auto suggestion, creating whatever we desired out of our own minds?

Now there began a low, mumbling monotone, moaning voices pitched in the deepest of tones.

"How better could they begin," I asked myself, "if they wish to hypnotize someone else? How do I know that Old Sherap's reluctance was not a trick, that the sorcerers are not intent on hypnotizing me, that I may take stories of their wonders to the outside world?"

The chanting monotone continued. Heads were still bowed. One could feel a drowsiness creeping over one's body. But I was not to be fooled. Hypnotism thus far. And rather simple too.

Then I realized that perhaps I was not playing the game fairly. How could I expect to find out anything about the weird ritual if I refused to see, hear, feel it? Daemons, if there were daemons, perhaps they could be called into being! Who was I to say the Tibetans did not know what they were talking about?

I stirred, looked around me—puzzled. For something I'd never experienced before was beginning to fasten itself upon me like invisible hands, to possess me against my will. I tried to shrug the feeling away. And the scientific side of me looked about for some explanation.

I looked at the chief Wizard, up there on the dais: a much feared and holy man. It struck me that he was seeking to control me and all the others. I fought against him. I had a distinct sense of struggle, as though our spirits had moved from our bodies to the
center of the clearing, to wrestle for the balance of power between us. I concentrated on driving back the will of the head one. I fought mightily but my thoughts kept fading strangely. The mumbling monotone of the Nukhwas around us was mounting in a rumbling crescendo that crept into the blood, into the mind, into the very soul.

"Yamantaka Yamantaka Yamantaka."

The circle of conjurers began to sway softly from side to side. The chanting continued to swell. And I began to think of all that Old Sherap had told me of what I must see there, Yama, King of Hell, and his satellite daemons and devils. I watched the spot where the daemons were supposed to appear, trying to see something where reason told me there was nothing.

I do not know what my camera would have seen. I only know what I thought I saw. Yama, King of Hell was appearing little by little! He did not come in through the trees. He was not a Tibetan masquerading. One moment he was not there, and the space empty. Then he began to grow before my very eyes.

All the circle of sorcerers saw it at the same time. Wilder and wilder became their chanting. It was not like a dream. Beyond the Grand Wizard, all around us, I could see the poplars and the pines. I saw the sorcerers—noted their faces deliberately. I made special note of Old Sherap beside me, with his 12 feet of hair coiled like a black snake atop his head. But Yama was coming at our call. As fervently as any other Nukhwa, I was intoning in the deepest voice I could manage, "Yamantaka."

It was the glaring bulging eyes I saw first. At the height of an average man from the ground they stared
at us, filled with malevolence. To right and left of the eyes were strange mists, which shifted and began to take form until, like some evil flower bursting suddenly into bloom, they became all the thirty-four arms of Yama with thirty-four hands each grasping some implement of destruction.

The main head grew into being about the eyes. Then appeared other heads, until there were nine all shrouded in transparent bluish flames, which danced and flickered about unceasingly. Then the shoulders, over which hung a garland of human skulls, which rattled horribly at the least movement.

I shivered. I glanced away. When I looked back I expected that Yama would no longer be there. But he was, staring at me with his bulging eyes. His lips now were visible, and they were huge and libidinous—and the teeth like the fangs of no animal on earth.

But Yama was only the beginning. After him, the hardest to evoke, the lesser devils came willingly enough. I recognized the daemon of lust, whom Old Sherap had called Nguh Nukh—a writhing daemon whose twistings were the twistings of lusting men and women in fleshly travail. He danced before us, and love became something obscene, lascivious, horrible. The daemon of hunger was next, his ribs showing through his skin. The daemon of anger followed, shapeless, with a face all twisted with passion, and a body like the snakelike pile of hair on the head of some Nukhwa, writhing, out of control. Other devils and daemons appeared and then, as though it were a grand finale of the ceremony, Yama himself began his dance macabre, the most horrible of all, its very movement mocking the miseries of mankind with the clank-
ing of his necklaces of skulls. I could smell the odor of death.

What now if these sorcerers could not control the daemons they had brought forth? The mere thought of it caused cold perspiration to bathe me from head to foot—for Yama and his minions had become as real to me as my own self. I knew that if he escaped, all the country was doomed.

Suddenly I could feel the same tension among my brother sorcerers. The daemons were seeking to escape their invisible bonds, and the Nukhwas were uniting their wills against them. Though I told myself that this was some trick of mass—or self hypnosis, I found myself applying my will, adding it to the others, to beat back the surge of those devils. I strained against them. I almost put out my hands to push them back, until I realized that my hands would be as nothing against Yama and his satellites.

Whatever I had pretended before, I was now a Nukhwa amongst Nukhwas, fighting daemons. Would we win? It seemed ages before the answer came. When it did I had a fierce surge of exultation.

Yama began to fade. It was an age before he vanished entirely. Nguh Nukh went, and the daemons of hunger and anger, and reluctantly all the other devils, until we were just a score of sorcerers facing Drukh Shim there on his boulder. And I felt that had there been one less, Yama would have prevailed against us.

I did not look at the others. I was shivering. I sat there numb with what I had seen, until the last sorcerer had gone into the Sacred Forest, each alone as he had come, into the gathering darkness. Only Old Sherap remained.
"And what now dost thou believe?" he asked in a strange voice.

"My friend," I said, "I do not know. I think I saw Yama and his devils. Just now I am sure I saw them, and they were as you had described them to me. What I shall believe tomorrow, I have not the slightest idea...."

To this day the spectral things I saw in that Sacred Forest, the things I do not believe in—but saw at least with the eyes that were mine while the swaying mob held me—abide with me constantly. There was something in that twilight in the high Tibetan forest which I could not and cannot even now explain.

* * * *

And as Old Sherap would ask, so the question is repeated, "Dost thou now believe?"

God called a man to scale Tibet's mountains of darkness and mystery—destined him to carry the gospel through the very powers of hell, and as no other had been able to do. His name was Victor G. Plymire.
Yama! King of Hell as he appears in the devil dance.
These challenging mountains along the northeastern border of Tibet were crossed by Mr. Plymire and a fellow missionary during a short expedition into Tibet in 1908.

A small portion of the camp at a religious gathering where the missionary and his co-workers preached to thousands of Tibetans, at the invitation of the chief.
Aku Chiri, Tibetan outlaw and Mr. Plymire’s language teacher.

Typical Tibetan women of Rehb t’sa, 1909.
2. Toward the Mountains

Amos and Laura Plymire were humble Christians, living in Loganville, Pennsylvania. When little Victor Guy was born into their home, January 10, 1881, he brought great happiness to them both. Not long after, however, their happiness was turned to sorrow. The baby became seriously ill, and in a matter of hours was at the point of death. A kindly doctor came, did what he could for the child, then gave his verdict: Victor could not possibly live.

The dread news was a crushing blow. What were the grief-stricken parents to do? With a strong faith in God, Laura refused to give up the child. Silently she lifted the wasted little form in her arms, carried it into the bedroom and closed the door. She laid the child on the bed before the Lord and remained on her knees in believing prayer. In that hour the young mother joined in a covenant with God. With
implicit faith she dedicated her baby to Him for as long as he should live. The child recovered, gained in strength and grew normally. It was evident that the Great Physician had a special plan for the life of this child.

The mother never forgot that she had given her son to God. Unceasingly she prayed for him, striving to bring to bear those influences which would shape his life for God's best use. Though there were many uncertain years in which it seemed as if her efforts were wasted, she was finally rewarded.

One evening, Victor, now grown into vigorous young manhood, was walking down the street when he heard the sound of gospel singing. He followed the sound until he came upon a group of Christian workers conducting a street service. Caught by the Spirit of God, he listened intently to their testimonies; then, when the meeting was over, he followed the group to a small hall where another meeting was soon in progress. From that time on, the young man attended faithfully, and at each meeting the conviction of sin grew stronger in his soul.

And then it happened! "That night I shall never forget," he testified. "Mother was there too. She was praying for me. And in a few moments I was safe in Father's house."

Soon after his conversion, young Victor found employment with an electrical construction company. Advancing rapidly, he was before long receiving top pay. Yet, though a successful future in the commercial world seemed assured, God had other plans for him. Spiritual struggles began again as the Spirit indicated that Victor was wanted for full-time Christian service.

As soon as the young man had yielded to this call
Toward the Mountains

of God, he sold his equipment without delay. He joined a group known as the Gospel Herald Society and entered the Christian ministry. With his mother’s “God bless you, son, and be faithful!” ringing in his ears, he started out on the path which eventually would lead him to the land of Tibet.

Home mission work proved to be full of discouragements. The young minister’s calling was fully tested. In one city he labored six full months before even a degree of success was granted. Meantime, he was often without food. After he had begun work in another town he met a different kind of opposition. His life was threatened! He was ordered to move on. But he refused. At least he did not move on until some time later when he had established a thriving church.

The young minister knew very little about the strange and far-off country of Tibet, yet about this time he began to be burdened for that place and its people. He felt strongly impressed to apply for missionary service there.

Quite unexpectedly one morning Mr. Plymire received a telegram inviting him to appear before the mission board for an interview. He was accepted! He would be sent to Northwest China, right to the Tibetan border. His monthly allowance would be the imposing sum of twenty-five dollars! Though he was alone, he was happy in the thought of knowing and doing God’s will. It was on February 4, 1908 that the new recruit sailed from Seattle, Washington. He was on his way to the mountains of Tibet!

Arriving safely at Shanghai, the young missionary purchased passage on a small river steamer, plying up the Yangtze river to the city of Hankow in Central China. The journey had not been too difficult up
to this point but from Hankow on the new recruit was to learn something of the rigors of pioneer missionary life.

He was fortunate to find another missionary wishing to make the same journey on into the interior, and together they boarded a crude craft built of rough planks. Three cabins thatched with bamboo perched on the narrow deck. In one of these they found their quarters.

It was a slow and tedious journey. The boat's crew, pulling the tiny craft along by means of ropes as they walked upon the rugged riverbank, inched their way upstream at the rate of five miles a day! Each night as the weary passengers lay down to sleep, hordes of hungry cockroaches emerged from cracks between the timbers to torment their unfortunate victims. A swarm of rats added to their discomfort. Monotonously the clumsy scow creaked and trembled against the muddy current of the Han river.

For three long months the small boat labored against the angry stream. As they entered more mountainous areas, the river changed to a raging torrent. Progress became even slower as the weary crew continued their fight against the increasingly violent waters.

One day, while encountering some rapids, the boat was hurled against a jagged rock, leaving a gaping hole in its bottom. All hands, both missionaries and crew, worked desperately to run the boat aground before it could sink. They finally made it, but this was small consolation to the missionaries, for they found that all their possessions had become thoroughly water soaked—some of them ruined beyond use.

The remainder of the trip went fairly well; yet it
was with genuine relief that the young missionary and his friend arrived in the city of Han Chung.

The river journey was ended, but Victor was still three hundred miles from his destination. So he wasted no time in securing a pack mule and a guide for the overland journey through the mountains. Bidding his erstwhile friend good-bye, he went on alone.

Ancient inns with their thatched roofs and mud walls came into view at intervals along the road. The towering mountains lent an ominous atmosphere to the unfamiliar surroundings. With the gradual climb the air thinned. There was a peculiar stillness everywhere. An oppressive loneliness crept over the traveler but he kept going onward toward he knew not what. Toward the close of the first day the dusty caravan descended a narrow path to a small village and found lodging for the night. After a supper of raw radishes and water, Victor Plymire improvised a bed by laying rough planks across two even rougher benches. Stretching his weary body upon these he sought for sleep.

"I never had a night like this one," he wrote later. "There were no less than seven other people in that small room, plus several pigs, a few grain bins, and various farm implements. My mule was also in the room — in fact, he could have kicked me with his hind legs if he cared to be ornery."

The road through the mountains seemed endless. Danger lurked in every shadowy ravine, behind every boulder for this was robber-infested territory. Suddenly aware that from this point on, his life would be in constant danger, the young missionary craved special assurance that God was with him. Would God give him a Bible promise for his missionary career,
a special promise which would cover all the unseen circumstances which might arise?

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee by the right hand of my righteousness."

It was as though the heavenly Father had spoken to him personally. Victor was convinced that these comforting words from Isaiah 41:10 were for him. The forceful manner in which the Spirit had brought the promise to him satisfied the need of his heart. And the years to come were to prove that God had not only made the promise but would keep it faithfully.

Nearing his destination Mr. Plymire saw his first Tibetan. The man wore a heavy sheepskin robe. A gaudy girdle of cloth was tied around his waist. From the girdle protruded a dangerous-looking sword. As the missionary was noting the similarity of the man's features with those of the American Indian, he was reassured by a friendly smile. The smile revealed white, even teeth, contrasting pleasantly with the dark, weather-beaten cheeks.

That evening the stop was at Cho Ni, a Tibetan monastery. A local resident here befriended the weary missionary, insisting that the white man come to his house for a meal. Though neither could understand the other, the common language of friendliness overcame this slight handicap.

The white man soon found himself inside the mud dwelling of his host, sitting cross-legged before a low table. As he wondered what might be in store for him, a pleasant-faced woman entered, her sheepskin
robe sweeping the dirt floor as she walked. Her hair hung to her waist in long black braids.

Taking several wooden bowls from a crude shelf, the woman wiped them with a grimy rag and placed them on the table before the diners. Then she brought in a large bowl containing what appeared to be flour. A second bowl was filled with a yellow mass resembling butter. The guest studied the flour carefully. Not too bad, he thought. But the butter looked rancid; for it was edged with green mould. A long black hair stuck out from the formidable mixture!

The small wooden bowls were soon filled with hot tea, and a chunk of the butter dropped in for seasoning. The missionary watched for his cue, following his host and the woman as they placed a few handfuls of flour into their bowls. How, he reasoned, is an American to eat this odd mixture? There were no forks or spoons—not even a pair of chopsticks. What was his Tibetan friend doing? Oh, no! Surely not. But, yes, he was mixing the ingredients with his fingers. And his hands were unwashed! Well, if this was the way Tibetans ate, the white man determined that while in Tibet he must do as the Tibetans did. He finished the meal barehanded—without benefit of fork or spoon, discovering to his delight that this Tibetan delicacy, called Tsam ba, actually tasted quite good, in spite of hairs, mould, etc.

Taking leave of his kind host the following morning, the missionary mounted his mule for the last miles of his long journey. As he rode along, his mind pondered many questions. What would the strange town where he would live be like? What would his experiences be? Would the Tibetans welcome him, an American? The sun was just beginning to set behind
the mountains as the tired traveler rounded the bend of the road leading into the town of Tao Chow. Nestled in a tree-clad valley, this place was to be his home!

In a few moments, the missionary rode through one of the large gates in the towering wall which surrounds this ancient town, just a few miles from the Tibetan border. Buildings of dried-mud brick confronted him. Curious Tibetans watched as the late arrival passed along the narrow streets in search of the mission station. With some difficulty he finally located the place.

Mr. Plymire was cheered by the warm welcome of the missionaries. He sat down to a meal such as he had not eaten in months. How much there was to talk about! Later in the evening his host showed him to his room where he excused himself and retired for the night.

But for Victor Plymire there was little sleeping. Most of that first night he lay awake from a great loneliness, reflecting on the events of the past, wondering about the uncertain future in this strange land, and—as the first rays of dawn began to filter through—studying the cracks in the crude mud walls of his room.
3. Knocking at the Door

The first concern of the young missionary was to secure a language teacher. It proved to be no small task, for the local Tibetans had all been threatened with severe punishment if any were found teaching their language to the white man. In spite of dim prospects, Mr. Plymire mounted a horse early one morning and rode off through the mountains in search of a teacher. After two days of riding he came to a small village. There he found a weathered Tibetan who—either foolhardy or brave—agreed to teach him. Dressed in a long robe of animal hide, his countenance as leathery as the robe wrapped around him, sporting a huge sword at his girdle, the man looked more like a bandit than a teacher.

The missionary eyed this picture of distrust and meanness for some time. The man’s suggestion for salary was high but the missionary must have a teacher.
Apparently this was the only one available. Doubtfully, the white man agreed.

In spite of his personal appearance, the teacher was surprisingly good at his job, taking his work very seriously. He instructed his pupil, not only in the Tibetan language but in Tibetan etiquette as well. The white man could not afford to be ignorant of Tibetan custom and the teacher would see to it that he learned it.

One morning the teacher placed a small platter of meat before his pupil.

"Eat!" he encouraged, sharply.

"What is it?" countered the missionary, examining the food ruefully, for it seemed to be on the verge of spoiling. He pushed the dish away from him.

"Eat!" the Tibetan urged a second time, but his pupil could not bring himself to touch the food, no matter how it affected his would-be host.

Nothing more was said of the matter until the next day, when the same fare was placed before the missionary. Again the teacher urged him to eat. Again he refused to partake. By the third day the uneaten meal was gathering dust. Mr. Plymire was both embarrassed and frustrated. What was he to do? Finally, he bowed his head in prayer, then, with one desperate attempt, he opened his mouth and forced the unpalatable mixture down. It took all the grace the young missionary had—and much of God's.

When the ordeal was over the teacher smiled: "You have learned a valuable lesson: Never refuse to eat what a Tibetan offers you. To do so will offend him greatly." Victor Plymire had many an occasion to remember that lesson.

Friendship between teacher and pupil grew as the
two spent time in each other’s company. Came a day when this bond of friendship proved invaluable.

“I am leaving to visit some of your people just west of here,” announced the missionary.

“When will you be going?” asked the teacher.

“Tomorrow.”

The teacher suggested that his pupil wait one more day, yet hesitated to announce his reason.

“But why must I wait?” demanded Mr. Plymire.

“I’m ready to leave now.”

The Tibetan looked at his pupil thoughtfully, then answered, “If I were not your friend, I would never tell you this.” He glanced about him cautiously before continuing. Drawing closer to Mr. Plymire he whispered hoarsely, “I am the leader of a robber band which hides out along the route you wish to follow. If you insist on going so soon, it will be fortunate for you if you ever come back alive. If you will wait, I will send word to my men so that they will not harm you as you pass by.”

This was incredible! His teacher a robber chief? Well, at least there was one redeeming fact: the robber chief was his friend. And needless to say, the missionary waited until it was safe for him to proceed on his mission.

The end of the first day’s journey found the missionary at a small village just over the border inside Tibet. Friendly residents entertained the white man with the best of their means. Mutual conversation continued far into the night.

The interested visitor listened to the bold tales of first one man, then another. The accounts of one wild-looking fellow were particularly harrowing. With great bravado he related the battles he had fought
with his fellows. As he spoke, a wide lance scar above his ear and an ugly sword gash across his forehead added a touch of reality to the tale. The firelight further disclosed half a thumb missing from the man’s right hand. The man boasted of having killed five of his countrymen. Then he took his seat again with the rest amid the laughter and friendly chatter of the men.

Mr. Plymire leaned across to ask, "Why did you have to kill all those men?"

The reply was simple. “If I had not killed them,” the boaster mused smugly, “they would have killed me.” Which put an end to the matter.

Next morning, having said good-bye to his newfound friends, the missionary took again to the rugged trail through the mountains. Finding himself in unfamiliar territory, he suddenly realized that his teacher could no longer be responsible for his safety. He was alone in robber-infested territory. Alone, except for his heavenly Father.

As he rode along, the majestic and lonely view disquieted him. High above, the mountain peaks were crowned with snow. Below, in a yawning canyon, a raging stream churned its way southward like a great and angry serpent turning in the sunlight. Following a bend in the narrow road, the missionary came to a crude log bridge thrown across a narrow point in the gorge. As he mounted the flimsy structure it threatened to crumble into the seething water below. Each motion of the horse stepping forward shook the very timbers.

Concentrating on getting himself and the animal safely across, Mr. Plymire was not aware of what was waiting for him on the opposite bank. It was not until
he reached the middle of the bridge that he saw them—a band of Tibetans, armed with broadswords, spears and ancient muskets.

Fear gripped the missionary as he stared ahead. What could he do? Turn back he dared not. All he could do was to keep riding forward. As he drew closer he could see the men plainly, silhouetted against the rocky wall of the gorge. The awful truth began to dawn upon him: these men were robbers! He pulled to a stop on the bridge, trying desperately to think of some way to escape. There was none. He was trapped.

Then he remembered God's lifetime promise. Would it hold true now? He bowed his head to pray—silently, earnestly. If his Master could not protect him in this, his first crisis, there was no possibility of further service on the mission field. He would put God to the test and ride forward toward the men who were blocking the road.

Coming to the end of the bridge, he quickly spurred his horse to a gallop, praying as he rode. His faith was his only weapon, but it was enough! As he dashed past the robbers, not one of them moved nor uttered a sound. They were in a daze—transfixed by some unseen power. Up the road some distance the missionary drew his horse to a stop. Turning in his saddle, he was thankful to see the last of the men running off the other side of the bridge as though pursued. Soon they were out of sight in the bushes of the ravine.

What had caused a band of armed men to flee from a helpless missionary? What had they seen on that narrow bridge? Tibetan robbers run from no one. Yet they had made no attempt to touch this unarmed man. Even if no angel had appeared, even if no unseen
host was with the missionary on the bridge, one thing was certain: God had kept His promise. That night the missionary carried the gospel to a village where the message had never before been heard. It was a rewarding journey for Victor Plymire.

Returning to Tao Chow, the young missionary resumed his language study. His first venture among the Tibetans had given him an insight into the requirements of the rugged life he was to lead. For one thing, he would need to master the language. Until now his method had been to leave tracts and gospels with those he visited. This was good, but he must learn also to preach effectively in Tibetan.

At New Year's the Tibetan teacher, without giving notice, took his vacation. This gave his pupil an opportunity to make a long-desired trip.

About two hundred miles north of Tao Chow there is a large and famous monastery known as Kum Bum. A visit there should provide good experience for a new recruit. Without further delay, Mr. Plymire made his simple preparations. He wrapped himself in his heavy Tibetan robe, stuffed several bundles of gospels in his saddle bags and set out across the mountains to find the monastery.

Ten days of riding through bitter cold weather finally brought him up the hill that hid his destination from view. As he neared the crest he paused to gaze in awe at the scene before him. There, across the barren valley and clinging picturesquely to the mountainside, was the second largest monastery in all of Northeastern Tibet. Flashing brilliantly in the rays of the setting sun, the gold roofs of three temples threw out their challenge to the missionary.

His heart beat high with excitement as he rode
down the hill to find lodging for the night in the little town in the valley. Tomorrow he would visit the monastery. Early the next day Mr. Plymire set out for the monastery. Entering the area unchallenged, he walked slowly along the narrow cobblestone streets. Red-robed priests were hurrying to and fro, occupied with their religious duties. How the missionary hoped that these priests would welcome him and allow him to distribute his gospel literature as well!

The oriental splendor of the gold-domed temples was indeed awe-inspiring. Massive pillars supported the upswept roofs; walls of green-glazed brick rested on foundations of solid granite. Inside the temples the walls were hung with gorgeous silks and satins—rare tapestries in multi-colored designs. Butter lamps of varying sizes burned brightly as pilgrims offered their sacrifices to gods of gold, of silver, and of brass. One could not but be conscious of the very presence of satanic power in the dark recesses of the otherwise unlighted temple.

So far no one had hindered the missionary's tour through the buildings. Attracted now by strange sounds in a nearby building, he followed them until he stepped through an entrance into an expansive stone courtyard. Across the yard stood a very long and high stone building. Extending the full length of it was a massive flight of stone steps leading up to a long porch from which led several arched doorways. The missionary strode across the courtyard and climbed the steps to peer inside. It was pitch dark.

Making his way along the hall in the direction of the weird sounds, he noted how they took on a chanting beat with accented rhythm. The low, gutteral monotone seemed to augment the eeriness of the dark
room from which it came. Peering through an open door, he could hardly believe the sight that met his eyes. The dim light of flickering lamps revealed literally hundreds of red- and yellow-robed priests bowing before their deities. He watched their ceremony until there was an indication that it would soon conclude. Then the priests would be coming out. He stepped back into the shadowy doorway and waited.

In a few moments the chanting priests, two abreast, began to file past. Suddenly they noticed the white man! As one man they rushed upon him. They lifted him up above their heads, crying out in anger. Carrying him out into the street they thrust him from them. They drove him from the monastery grounds, shouting the stern warning that he must never return.

Outside the gates Victor Plymire stood still in the dusty road to appraise the situation. He was learning that he could not force open the doors. He must not try to rush the Tibetans into receiving the gospel. But as he walked slowly away from the monastery, he promised himself that, in spite of threatenings, he would someday return to try again.

The next few months were rather trying. Except for one short trip among the Tibetans in the spring, the remainder of the missionary’s time was spent in lesser service: sewing up sword wounds, amputating frozen fingers, extracting splinters and lancing boils. All of this seemed unimportant when compared with the need for taking the gospel message across the mountains of Tibet to the unreached villages. But it was all a demonstration of the Christian way; and many new friendships were formed through the mercy of pulling a rotting tooth or washing a sword wound.
Under these favorable circumstances it was easy to speak a word for the Master.

The monastery of Kum Bum still lay heavy upon the missionary's heart. He desired increasingly to reach the people there with the gospel message. When spring came he decided to try once more; and this time he would use more tact with the priests.

As he strode up the rocky ascent to the temple area from which he had been so rudely ejected, he prayed for divine help. Curious Tibetans watched idly as the white man passed by. Yellow-robed priests stopped to stare at him—then moved on unconcerned. With a pleasant nod of thanks an old man accepted a tract. So far so good.

Now the missionary offered a gospel to a passing priest. The priest frowned, hesitated a moment, then, accepting the booklet without a word, hid it in the folds of his robe. To the missionary's amazement no one seemed to object to his distributing of tracts. No one molested him. Even in the temple area where priests of every rank and temper milled around him carrying out their daily routine, no one said him nay.

At the end of the day the grateful missionary felt that at least something had been accomplished for the kingdom of God. Formerly closed doors seemed to be opening, if very gradually, to his continual knocking.
The Great Abbot of Labrang who granted Mr. Plymire permission to engage in gospel work on the monastery grounds.
Mr. Plymire en route to the great monastery of Labrang.

Labrang—largest monastery in northeastern Tibet.
4. Through Blood and Fire

It was early October, 1912. Victor Plymire had left the city of Tao Chow for Sian in West China. He had been asked to meet several missionaries there and escort them to the Tibetan border. He was unwittingly riding into grave danger, for he lived so far in the interior that he had no knowledge of the bloody revolution about to engulf China.

Wishing to conserve time, he followed a lonely shortcut through the mountains. Along the trail he inquired of a passer-by the distance to the village where he intended to stay for the night. Unintentionally the man misinformed him, making the distance much farther than it actually was. Thus Mr. Plymire rode on past the usual stopping place to another village beyond.

That night a band of robbers looted the first village, leaving behind them a scene of misery and despair.
Several Catholic priests attempted to escape from the village but they were discovered and hounded into a field of broomcorn outside the town. Not wishing to waste time hunting them out, the bandits set fire to the dry stalks and waited. Those poor souls who tried to escape the fire were caught and killed in a horrible fashion on the spot. Several others, including the priests, perished in the flaming field. Had Mr. Plymire been present at the time, he would have met the same cruel fate.

It was upon his arrival in Hsing Ping that the missionary received his first word of the great rebellion that was sweeping China. Even in remote areas lawlessness was rampant. Outlaw bands, taking advantage of the war situation, were engaging in wanton looting and killing. Among the mountain villages there was a reign of terror.

For nine days Victor Plymire was detained in troubled Hsing Ping while the fighting continued unabated farther up the mountain trail. On one eventful night no one in the city slept. That was the night an attempt was made to assassinate the Chinese general who was trying to maintain order. Everyone's life was in peril. At last the authorities permitted the missionary to resume his journey to Sian; but not without a personal bodyguard of soldiers.

Late one evening, after he had been almost a month on the way, the gates of the walled city came into view. It was so late that the gates were closed for the night and would not be opened until morning.

"Let's sleep here for the night," suggested the leader of the bodyguard, gesturing to the dry ground around him.
"But will we not be safer inside the city?" parried Mr. Plymire.

"Of course, but the gates are closed and bolted for the night," the guard answered importantly. "Why, they would not open them at this hour, even for the emperor!"

"Well, we can at least try," replied the missionary. "They may let us in."

"You may try if you wish; we are remaining here." And the rebel soldiers came to a stubborn halt, refusing to go any farther.

Mr. Plymire rode up close to the first gate and called to the men on the inside: "Hello there!"

"Who are you?" a voice demanded sharply.

"An American missionary!"

"Do you have identification?"

"Yes!"

"Produce it then!"

For just such an occasion Mr. Plymire had made a crude-looking American flag. However, due to rumors that several more states had been admitted to the Union, he was not sure how many stars the flag should have. To make certain there would be enough he had sewed on fifty, reserving a few more in his pocket in case they might be needed.

He pushed this flag through a wide crack between the massive doors and waited while a muffled conversation went on inside.

The waiting seemed long. At last he heard the bar slide back and drop to the ground with a dull thud. Slowly one of the huge gates creaked open just far enough to admit the horse and its rider. As soon as the missionary was inside, the heavy gate was again pushed to and bolted. The watchman regarded the
unexpected visitor with sullen indifference, then let him pass on into the city's darkness.

After a half hour of searching for the humble mission station, the tired missionary arrived at the gate. Just how the word of his coming had reached the missionaries, he could not tell; but they were expecting him. They had remained awake to welcome him from his long journey. Inside the cozy home they showed no little relief over his safe arrival.

About midnight fighting broke out near the city wall. Shortly after, an anti-foreign gang, having incited a motley crowd to murderous frenzy, was heading for the mission station. “Kill the foreigners! Kill the foreigners!” they shouted as they marched down the street. Before Mr. Plymire and the missionaries could make their escape, the angry horde had surrounded the compound and battered down the doors. Buildings were set aflame while the blood-thirsty mob searched for the missionaries. In the wild confusion which followed, some of the missionaries were enabled to find concealment. Yet when the horror had passed many of the buildings had burned to the ground, and eight of the missionaries lay dead—brutally murdered. (It was learned later that the rebels killed eight thousand of their countrymen before the city was reasonably secured.)

Because the situation was so grave, the surviving missionaries—among whom was Victor Plymire—decided to leave Sian for a place of greater safety. Accordingly, the small party started out for the city of Hankow in Central China.

After five days of overland travel they boarded a small river boat which drifted lazily down stream. All went well until one night when the boat had docked
at a small village, a rough group of armed men forcibly took passage. Mr. Plymire detected that the men were traveling under a pretext of protecting the passengers. Their true purpose was revealed later when they ordered the boatman to bring his craft to shore. Jumping onto the bank, they proceeded to rob the village and terrorize its inhabitants. Then they returned to the boat and ordered the captain to move on down stream.

Mr. Plymire protested, but was told to mind his own business. A scuffle followed in which he was struck over the head with a heavy club. When he came to, it was plain to him that the missionaries were being held as hostages. The bandits knew that they themselves would not be attacked from the shore for fear that the foreigners on board would be injured. As the boat approached a well-guarded gorge, the missionaries became genuinely alarmed: they knew a gun battle would soon break out between the soldiers on shore and the bandits on the boat. The missionaries would be in between.

Since there was little use trying to persuade the bandits to leave the boat, the missionaries decided that they themselves would have to do so. When they told the bandits their plans, these evil men decided to let them go: they had had enough trouble with the missionaries.

Having once again by the grace of God escaped possible death, the little company engaged another boat and finally arrived at Hankow. Here Mr. Plymire was asked to accompany a fellow missionary back to the United States. This poor man's nerves had quite given way during the fighting.

Two years at home dragged slowly by for the young missionary. How anxiously he awaited word which
would permit him to return to the field. Finally it came and, in October of 1914, Victor Plymire left the shores of America for the second time.

How familiar now were the scenes of Shanghai, the trip by steamer to Hankow! From Hankow he rode this time on a small open freight car to Mien Chih where his belongings were dumped off the train and piled on a wooden-wheeled cart. This rude conveyance was to take him to Sian.

A rather amusing situation delayed the missionary a whole day at Tung Kuan, a small town along the way. The continual passing of the crude wooden wagons had, after many decades of use, worn deep ruts into the dirt road. Now he was entering another province where the carts were wider, making the ruts farther apart. Thus it became necessary for all carts to stop and change to a wider axle. Mr. Plymire’s driver had to change axles also. Thus must the Chinese conform to the old ruts which former generations have bequeathed to them!

Having passed through Sian, Mr. Plymire stopped at Lung Chow where he found missionaries by the name of Nelson. From the Nelsons he learned how many dangers he had escaped while on furlough. During his absence the whole Northwest had been terrorized by outlaw leaders, the most feared of these being a sinister character known as White Wolf.

“One fateful day,” recalled Mr. Nelson, “we heard that White Wolf and his gang were approaching our town of Lung Chow. Before we could escape, the whole robber band had entered the town and begun their diabolical work.

“My wife quickly prepared some tea and cakes to offer White Wolf when he arrived at our door. We
didn’t have to wait long. We watched helplessly while several of the robbers ransacked our rooms, taking whatever things they wished. Then White Wolf himself made his appearance, accompanied by a personal bodyguard. We welcomed him in and offered him the tea and cakes, which he accepted somewhat graciously.

“After the refreshments, Mrs. Nelson informed the bandit chief that his men had taken some of our precious things. Instead of becoming angry, the chief commanded his men to return our stolen goods. And to make full restitution he gave our children a lump of pure silver to play with. Furthermore, he stationed two armed guards at our door with strict orders to prevent any of the rest of the gang from entering.”

In such a way was manifested the mercy and care of the living God for his dear children.

Taking leave of the Nelsons, Mr. Plymire spent the next two weeks riding the rocky trail to Tao Chow. As he rounded the last bend of the road, he could see the familiar town in the distance. Something, however, seemed different. Spurring on his horse, he was shocked; as he came closer, by what he saw. Almost the entire town was in ruins, like the aftermath of an earthquake. Everywhere he looked there was evidence of violence, fire, and plunder.

Arriving at the mission station, Victor Plymire soon learned the reason from the faithful missionaries, who had managed to escape the doomed town in time. White Wolf and his hordes, they recounted, had swept through the area, leaving hundreds of dead and dying. It was estimated that seven thousand bodies were left horribly mangled in the streets and in the burning ruins. Of these, two thousand had taken refuge in a mosque. All of them were burned alive. As for the
guide who had led White Wolf into the city, he was later roasted alive in front of the fiendish leader and his gang—the guide’s services were no longer of use to them.

When the missionaries returned from their hideout, they found but little of their homes remaining. Whatever the robbers could carry away, they had taken, including some things Mr. Plymire had stored for his own use when he returned from America.

Prospects for the future looked gloomy indeed, yet the missionary was exceedingly happy in Christ Jesus. Though he had passed through blood and fire, was he not back where God wanted him? Since God had saved his life when so many other lives had been lost, he must now redouble his efforts to carry out the will of His Lord.
5. Iron Gates Yield

After a few days of rest at the mission station, Mr. Plymire rode off in search of his old Tibetan teacher. He found him hidden away in a small mountain village. The two were overjoyed at meeting each other again. Nothing would do but that the missionary should come back for a few weeks of language study. Returning to Tao Chow with haste, he quickly packed a few necessities into his saddle bags and returned to the village. How he loved this rugged life amid the mountains and the snows! His zest for it is revealed in a letter he sent to his parents during those days:

"Since I left Tao Chow we have had three snows. The last one was pretty heavy. I am in an altitude of 12,000 feet or more. It is very cold here.... On Saturday afternoon I walked out into the mountains and only a short distance from the village I shot a deer. So, I have plenty of fresh meat to eat. While here I
am living real native style. I have left everything foreign behind. For breakfast I have barley flour, tea, and butter. The meat is placed in a small pot and boiled. It is then put on a wooden platter with a knife, and as you want it you cut it off. I wish you could be here to enjoy it with me.”

Early the following spring the restless missionary determined to find a small monastery about which he had learned. After several days he discovered it in a fertile valley hidden by a ring of jagged mountain peaks. Though not imposing, the place seemed surrounded with an air of mystery that beckoned the missionary to discover its ageless secrets.

Approaching the gates he asked one of the priests for permission to visit the chief abbot. The priest nodded his approval and led the white man to the Living Buddha’s residence. In the reception room the missionary waited anxiously to be presented to this influential man. “What will the abbot say?” he thought. “Will he ask me to leave?” He bowed his head to ask for guidance in speaking to this great one who could so easily open or shut the doors of opportunity.

His thoughts were interrupted by the appearance of the mighty Tibetan at the end of the great reception hall. In his rich robes of red and yellow, the man was an impressive sight. He approached the missionary with a warm smile on his tanned face—a smile of welcome that answered the white man’s questions, at least for the moment.

The abbot displayed all the graces of Tibetan custom, even inviting the missionary to dinner. “You have traveled a long way. We must become ac-
quainted,” he smiled, leading the way to a dimly lit dining room.

The two sat long at the dinner table, with the missionary taking advantage of each opportunity to explain the way of salvation to his host.

“Has someone been here before me to bring you this good news?” asked Mr. Plymire.

“No,” declared the Buddha. “You are the first white man to come here. I have never before heard the story you have just told me.”

How humbled the young missionary felt to think that God had seen fit to choose him to bring the Light to this valley, in darkness for centuries past!

“With your permission,” he urged the abbot mildly, “I should like to give out tracts and gospel portions to the priests here at the monastery.”

Not only was this permission granted, but the missionary was presented by the Buddha with a parting gift of five silver dollars, and urged to return soon for another visit. The two parted at the door of the reception hall.

Mr. Plymire spent the rest of the day distributing the Word of God among the priests. It was a joyous time of seed-sowing. His heart overflowed as he thought of the way God was guiding and using him.

On the way back to Tao Chow, however, the missionary almost lost his life. He attempted to ford an icy river. It was frozen solid except for a few yards in midstream. Thinking that the water there could not be very deep, he urged his horse into the dark current, then realized too late that the stream was deeper than he had judged. The horse went under and out of sight; the rider was pitched off into the icy water.

Young Plymire bobbed to the surface spitting muddy
water and gasping for breath. Fighting his way to the edge of the ice, he tried to pull himself up only to feel it break under his weight. Swiftly the current carried him toward a point where the stream flowed into a wider river which was completely frozen over.

Fear gripped his heart. He knew that unless he could save himself quickly he would meet a fearful, horrible death under the ice. Surely this was not to be his end! Closer and closer the current swept him to the shelf of ice ahead. Already he could hear the suction of the water rushing under the ice. He must make it! With one final and desperate effort he was bringing one leg up over the ice. Now the other. The ice held!

Not daring to think, he rolled over and over until he had reached the bank where he dragged himself to a sitting position. Well, he was at least alive—God be praised! He stood up to look for his horse, muddy water dripping from his half-frozen clothing. He could see the animal downstream in the bushes. Fortunately it had somehow managed to get out on the same side of the river as its rider. Because of the muddy banks, the missionary had no little difficulty in reaching his horse, but soon he was in the saddle again and riding in the direction of a small village where he would be able to dry his clothes and rest for the night.

Once again the life-time promise of God had proved sure. The Master who had brought young Victor Plymire through this harrowing experience was not yet finished with him—and the missionary knew it.

During these days of unceasing missionary activity, young Plymire had often felt a heart loneliness and a need for a faithful companion. As time went on, the bond between himself and a consecrated young lady
missionary was being strengthened through correspondence. Knowledge of her constant prayers on his behalf meant much to him. However, he felt that God's time had not yet come for him to bring his bride to this wild country and though the months seemed long, he, with Spartan courage, possessed his soul in patience. Marriage and a home with the one he loved must wait.

It was late in April of 1916 that the young missionary set out on a new venture, this time in company with a Tibetan Christian. He was drawn by a strong inward compulsion to visit Labrang, the largest monastery in Northeastern Tibet and located about eighty miles northwest of Tao Chow. Years before some missionaries had ventured there but they were driven away by the enraged priests. From that time on, no one had attempted to visit this forbidden sanctuary of Buddhism.

Late one evening the missionary and his guide emerged from a narrow gorge and rode over the hill from which they could see the monastery only a quarter of a mile distant. Nearby in a village they found an inn. There, after eating a frugal meal, they retired for the night.

Before daylight the next morning they left the inn to climb a wooded mountain high above the monastery. Looking down they could see the red-robed priests, busy with their temple activities, and many Tibetan pilgrims arriving constantly, bringing gifts for the temple gods. As they watched they laid their plans. The two men would return to the village, then boldly enter the monastery grounds with tracts and gospels.

But their plans were short-lived. They had hardly entered the temple area when suddenly the dusty
street ahead of them was filled with angry priests who demanded that they leave at once. Brandishing clubs, they drove the two men back to their inn with threats of violence. It was no use to try further that day. So with heavy hearts the missionary and his Tibetan companion left the village; but not without a determination to return.

Only a few days later Mr. Plymire felt impressed to try again. As before the two set out for Labrang and on arrival put up for the night in the same inn. But a group of priests, having learned that they were in the place, demanded to be let in. Once inside, the priests immediately asked for the white man. Much concerned as to his fate, the missionary presented himself.

“You are to leave at once,” commanded the angry priests.

“But it is night and we cannot go now,” replied Mr. Plymire. “Kindly allow us to remain until morning.”

“Well and good,” they relented, “but you must leave in the morning.” With this they turned and trooped back to the monastery, leaving the missionary to his thoughts.

In the morning as the two ambassadors talked with the innkeeper, they heard good news. The young Buddha whom Mr. Plymire had met in that smaller monastery in the mountains, now occupied a prominent position at this one. Furthermore, the innkeeper was acquainted with him.

“Will you not go to see him,” urged the missionary, “and ask if we may pay him a visit?”

“I will do what I can,” promised the innkeeper and left immediately for a visit with the priests.
Only an hour or so later as Mr. Plymire stepped out into the yard, he saw the innkeeper returning, and with him two distinguished-looking men. "We have come to escort you to the Buddha," they announced. "Come with us immediately."

Without further delay the missionary gathered up a few appropriate gifts and accompanied the two Tibetans to the monastery. How could he help feeling a little proud as these two men conducted him past the very priests who had ordered him away a few days before! They dared not touch him now.

He followed the two robed guides through one courtyard after another, passing several great and ornate buildings. His guides urged him to enter one of these imposing structures. Soon he found himself in the Buddha's reception room. It was magnificent. Expensive furs covered the floors; the walls and ceilings were panelled with the finest wood.

All waited in silence while the great Buddha made his dignified appearance. Approaching with slow and stately steps the man measured his visitors with a sharp glance, then turned and paused at the foot of a small white dais. A servant removed his boots. Seating himself on the dais he bowed in acknowledgment of those present, then beckoned the missionary forward.

For this occasion Mr. Plymire had brought a ceremonial scarf similar to those which all Tibetans present to anyone from whom they desire a favor. Approaching the Buddha he extended his gift. If the Buddha should receive it, this would be a sign of welcome; if not, the missionary must lose no time in departing the place for good.

Without hesitation the great Buddha reached down
to receive the scarf. The white man was welcome—the Buddha was still his friend.

Formalities over, the missionary was seated near the Buddha so that the two might converse. Later he was served the most sumptuous meal he had ever eaten—at least sixteen courses of every kind of meat and vegetable imaginable. He learned that this man was attendant to the Grand Lama, chief ruler of the great monastery. If only Mr. Plymire could meet this mighty one, he might receive permission to distribute his gospels without fear of violence. But surely it would be expecting too much that a man so convinced of his own religion would have anything to do with the white man's gospel. Pushing these doubts aside the missionary asked his host if it would be possible for him to arrange an audience with the Grand Lama.

"It may be possible," he answered. "I must go to talk with him first; then I will return to give you his answer."

Leaving the room in silence, the Buddha made his way to the Grand Lama's palace to present the missionary's petition.

"What is it you want?" asked the great man importantly.

"A white friend of mine has visited me and wishes to have audience with you also."

"Is he to be trusted? These foreigners are well-known for their evils."

"I will be his security," promised the Buddha. "You may hold me responsible for whatever evil he may bring to us."

"Very well then, tell your friend to come at once."

Soon Mr. Plymire was being escorted by his friend and lesser officials to the Grand Lama's residence.
Again he marveled as he observed the astounding display of wealth on every hand. The imposing structure which contained the throne room was overlaid with pure gold, its roof flashing brilliantly in the bright sunlight. As they crossed the threshold the missionary's attention was instantly directed to the aged Tibetan upon the throne. He was dressed in robes of crimson and bright yellow satin. His silvery beard added to his venerable appearance.

With mingled emotions of hope and fear Mr. Plymire endured the stolid gaze of the Grand Lama's eyes. At the proper moment he stepped forward to extend the ceremonial scarf. Slowly the wrinkled, expressionless face of the Lama broke into a warm smile. The old man reached down and received the scarf, thereby declaring his friendship to the white man. When the ceremonies and customary refreshments were finished, Mr. Plymire offered to make a number of photographs of the Lama. This seemed to please him very much. It was then that the missionary made his request: Might he be permitted to distribute his gospels and tracts among the people of the monastery?

"Yes," replied the Grand Lama, "you may do so. And since there are so many people you may take as many as ten days to do as you have requested."

The missionary could hardly believe his ears. Surely the Lord was with him in this! Overjoyed, he began working as fast as possible. He must get the gospel message to these people while the golden opportunity lasted.

Although he had permission to distribute his gospels, he knew his days were numbered. Sure enough, on the eleventh day the Grand Lama sent word that the missionary must leave. He had learned that his priests
resented the presence of the white man and he feared there might be an incident—even bloodshed.

That very evening one of the lesser priests whom Mr. Plymire had formerly befriended approached him secretly. “You should leave early in the morning,” he whispered. “It is not safe for you to remain here longer.” Mr. Plymire thanked the man and watched him disappear in the shadows of the monastery.

Although the missionary and his guide left at daybreak, they were none too soon. Only minutes after their get away, a group of evil-looking characters gathered around the inn. The missionary learned later that these men had inquired about the route he would be taking through the mountains. No one seemed to know.

Meanwhile the two men were well on their way, on the lonely trek back to Tao Chow. Mr. Plymire felt impressed to turn in his saddle and look back. They were being followed! Their pursuer was a stranger—and on horseback. They waited for him to catch up.

“Where are you going?” asked the stranger, pulling up alongside.

“Home,” replied Mr. Plymire, very suspicious of the man.

“Which route will you be taking?”

“Wait and see.” The missionary urged his horse ahead impatiently; the stranger dropped behind but continued to follow at a distance.

At a familiar fork in the road the two men took the narrow trail leading to Tao Chow. It was a steep ascent with mountains towering on either side. Here and there huge boulders had tumbled down near the roadside, almost blocking the road in some places. Ap-
prehensively the two men skirted the deep, yawning ravines—good hideouts for robbers.

Now there was the sound of swift hoofbeats behind them. They saw not one but two Tibetans riding in pursuit. One of them was the man who had accosted them a few minutes before. Obviously these two were up to some kind of mischief. Beckoning his guide alongside, Mr. Plymire prepared to block the progress of the two strangers attempting now to pass them. Each time the strangers tried to get ahead the missionary and his guide inconveniently got in their way. In exasperation the men gave up at last and dropped a good distance behind. Minutes later they had disappeared altogether. It was with a sigh of relief that the two weary travelers arrived in Tao Chow—safe, at least for the present.

It was during the latter part of this his second term on the mission field that Victor Plymire began to feel a need for greater power in witnessing to the Tibetans. He wanted to see them saved—truly converted to Christ. Surely, there must be some spiritual experience available which would enable him to accomplish more for God. As time passed this heart-hunger for power with God and man did not diminish but rather increased.

Early in April, having finished his language studies, Mr. Plymire made preparations for another trip which would take him and his companion through unknown territory. For years a small monastery west of Labrang had refused access to outsiders. The missionary attempted to secure the services of some local Tibetans to show him the way to the monastery but they steadfastly refused.
“Not us,” they said, “there are too many robbers and they would be sure to see us.”

Several days later, on the road, he again tried to persuade someone to act as guide but without success.

“Then will you please tell us how to find the monastery by ourselves?” he asked him.

“Go in that direction,” the man said, pointing toward a mountain trail.

So the two men resumed their journey with little knowledge of where they were going—much less of what was in store for them when they arrived there. Before long a fog settled down over the trail, so dense that everything was hidden from view. Now they really were in for trouble.

Breathing a prayer for guidance, Mr. Plymire and his companion pressed on. What followed was nothing short of a miracle. He writes of his experience in his diary:

“Just then a small rainbow appeared before us and a voice seemed to say, ‘Follow in this.’ This we did for a long time. Then my faith really gave away and I said to my friend, ‘We had better wait here till the fog clears away.’ I had no sooner said this than the rainbow disappeared and we saw it no more. But when the fog had cleared away, there was the pass right before our eyes. Had we followed the rainbow, it would have taken us right through the pass and into the valley where we could never have gone wrong. How we had failed God through lack of simple trust!”

Arriving at the monastery the missionary was well received. Neither the priests nor the people showed any hostility but rather seemed to take a real liking to the young white man. They examined him as one might examine a museum piece, asking countless ques-
tions about his clothes and where he had come from and why was he there. This was the opportunity he had been waiting for. Slowly and carefully he told them the simple story of salvation. Before leaving them he presented each person who could read with a gospel and a tract so that a witness might remain after he departed.

God had again worked to make Himself known in another corner of Tibet where the gospel message had not been heard before.
Lhasa traders making spiritual preparation before beginning the long journey from Tangar.

One of the rooms rented to the Plymires by a Tibetan friend; their living quarters during the first winter at Tangar.
The first Tibetan to venture into the Plymire's home.

The first Tibetan service conducted at the mission station.
6. Partnership

The time had finally come when the young missionary felt that God would have him marry the girl of his choice, Miss Grace Harkless. Already they had been engaged for five years. The simple wedding took place on January 1, 1919 in the town of Min Chow situated a short distance from the city of Tao Chow near the Tibetan border. The happy newlyweds remained there but a short time before returning to America for a well-deserved furlough.

While traveling from place to place in America the Plymires met some earnest Pentecostal believers who encouraged them to wait upon God for the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. One day, while they were seeking God in prayer, both of them were filled with the Spirit. It was then that they realized that this was what they had been longing for all these years. This was the power which would overcome the strongest
barriers in Tibet and cause the gates of iron to yield to the claims of Christ!

In 1920 Mr. Plymire was ordained by the Assemblies of God. For a short time thereafter he pastored a church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Deep in his soul, however, he felt that God wanted him in Tibet, and he knew he could never rest until he was back there again. Accordingly the Plymires prepared to leave for far-off Tibet once more. As they visited various churches they placed before the people the needs of that dark neglected land. During this period of itineration—on July 13, 1921, to be exact—little John David arrived. That was indeed a blessed day for the Plymires.

Preparations finally completed, the Plymire family sailed from the west coast in February 1922. Soon after arriving in Shanghai they once more began the long trek across China to the Tibetan border. Leaving his wife and son in Min Chow, Mr. Plymire spent several months traveling in Northeastern Tibet. He purposed to find the most suitable location for contacting Tibetans in the greatest numbers.

He decided upon the town of Tangar, situated across the Tibetan border about fifty miles east of the sacred lake, Ko Ko Nor. He had good reason for making his headquarters at Tangar. The town was the primary trading center on the route between China and India. Great numbers of Tibetans came from all parts of their country to do business in Tangar. Local Tibetans lived only a few miles away in all directions. Moreover, the missionary would be living but twenty-five miles from Kum Bum, a monastery second only to Labrang in size and splendor. In this excellent location Mr. Plymire could labor not only among Tibetans but also
among the many Chinese residents who did business with the Tibetans.

And now to bring the little family from Min Chow over the rugged mountain trails to Tangar, preparations must be made. For fourteen weary days they faced the dangers of the hills, Mrs. Plymire and the boy riding in a rough wooden cart, with Mr. Plymire guiding them on horseback.

What a great relief it was to them all when the old cart emerged from a deep gorge and bounced around the final turn in the road. Directly ahead lay Tangar, spread out in full view at the foot of towering mountains to the north. A large river and several smaller ones shimmered serpentine along the valley floor, watering lush green fields. Far to the west more mountains rose into the cobalt sky; across the southern horizon stretched a range of beautiful rugged peaks covered with a heavy mantle of snow.

This was to be their new home. A thrill of unspeakable joy swept through Victor Plymire as the little family rode on through the east suburb and passed under the great arch of the massive gate in the city wall. God had brought them safely to their desired haven.

A curious crowd followed the little family as they searched for a lodging for the night. The room they found was next to an animal stall, barren of furniture. But at least it was shelter.

The following day the father went to look for some kind of a permanent home for his family. To his dismay he found that the Tibetans would not rent to a foreigner—they had been threatened with punishment if they should do so. No one offered assistance and the missionary returned to his wife and child that night
greatly disappointed. After several days of walking the streets, he was finally approached by a Tibetan who offered to rent two of his rooms.

The rooms proved to be very small, with floors of damp dirt. They could be heated only with an open hearth in one corner and would have to serve as kitchen, bedroom and living room combined. How could the missionary bring his young wife and baby to such a dismal place? He couldn’t bear to think of it; yet if this was part of the cost of being missionaries, they would pay it.

That same day the Plymires moved into their new home and prepared to make the best of it. With humble hearts they prayerfully dedicated their first home to the Lord’s service.

That winter was a trying one. It was bitter cold. For weeks the thermometer stayed at twenty below zero. To add to their troubles, the missionaries were forgotten by friends in the homeland. No letters meant low finances. Often the diet was insufficient: hunger must be satisfied with just potatoes and salted vegetables. But God did not fail them. Occasionally some of the local people softened in their attitude and brought in food when it was most needed.

Then one day Mr. Plymire discovered a choice lot, with some old buildings on it, for sale. Ideal in its location for a mission, there was still the need for money with which to buy it. And the old buildings must be wrecked and new ones built.

"I figure it would cost about six thousand dollars, Grace," reported her husband. "But where will we get the money? The mission board has sent us all they can afford to. The amount that has come from friends for this project is not nearly enough."
“Well, dear, we can pray, can’t we?” his wife replied, “and God will answer, I know.”

Pray they did—and daily. And God did answer, too, though not in the manner they expected. During prayer God began to speak to their hearts about certain funds of their own.

“Victor, you know about the money I fell heir to before we were married. I put it in the bank thinking it would come in handy some rainy day; but the Lord has been suggesting that I use it now.” Grace waited for her husband’s reaction.

“Yes, I know, Grace. And I have that money I saved when I was doing secular work. But does God require that we give these funds? After all,” her husband went on, “have we not already given up a life of ease to suffer privation out here? I fear I am tempted at times to think that God asks too much. Why does He not stir others to help?”

“But, dear, surely the salvation of Tibetans is more important than our money. Are we really Christ’s followers if we love anything else more than we love lost souls?”

Thus God brought them to a point of decision. They agreed that His cause had rightfully claimed their all. Without delay the money was drawn out of the bank—to the last dollar. They had done it for the Master’s sake, and they expected nothing in return.

In due time the property was secured. Construction on the new Tangar church went ahead to completion, and services were begun as planned. At first the building was packed with Tibetans listening to the story of salvation through Christ, and the Plymires felt rewarded for all their sacrifice. But Satan was not content to let this great victory go unchallenged.
The superstitious Tibetans became suspicious of the missionaries' good intentions. Word began to be passed about that anyone who entered the foreigners' buildings would never be seen again. The white man would kill those who came, remove their eyes and their hearts and use them for making medicine. The crowds dwindled rapidly! For a long time, no one came at all. Day after day, the missionary stood at the entrance of the church, inviting the Tibetans to come in; but they would not.

Then one day a passing Tibetan stopped to talk to the missionary. Keeping the man's mind occupied with the conversation, Mr. Plymire began slowly to back up. The man followed, talking. Finally he was standing in the yard before the missionary's home. In an off-hand manner Mr. Plymire invited the Tibetan in to inspect the house. Curiosity overcoming fear, the man entered and began to examine everything with interest. Outside again, Mr. Plymire took a picture of the man, asking him to return in a few days to claim the finished photograph. Later when he saw his own image on paper the Tibetan was overcome with surprise.

"Sir, this is like magic," he exclaimed.

"But have I harmed you in any way?" asked the missionary with a mischievous smile.

"Why, no!" confessed the Tibetan, as the risk he had taken began to dawn upon him.

News of this man's visit to the missionary's home soon spread through the neighborhood. Since this man has lived to tell about it, the people reasoned, the white man cannot be so bad after all.

Soon after this the missionary made his first Tibetan convert—and in a remarkable way.

The husband of this woman was a Chinese, and he
had recently been saved at one of the chapel services. Returning to his home, he had broken the good news to his Tibetan wife. She was not pleased; rather she became enraged.

“I’ll kill you and myself too, if you do not recant,” she threatened. Her brother, a Tibetan priest, encouraged his sister in this opposition to her husband, so that day by day she became more unreasonable. In spite of her ranting, the husband remained unmoved. He purposed to be true to his new-found Saviour.

One day the wife yielded to the devil and became possessed. So violent was her behavior that her relatives called in several priests who chanted far into the night in an attempt to exorcise the evil spirit. The attempt failed. The following day, after the priests had given up, the missionaries called on the family. Entering the room where the woman lay in a stupor, they battled with Satanic forces for the possession of a soul. Unbelieving relatives stood around to watch the results. The missionaries continued in prayer. Mr. Plymire laid his hands upon the woman:

“In the name of Jesus,” he fairly shouted, “I command you, evil spirit, to leave.” And the demon left the body of its victim.

Several Tibetans claimed they saw a loathsome, beastlike creature come out of the woman on the floor. One bystander in the doorway was knocked down as the demon left the place!

Again Christ had triumphed. The Tibetan woman was now free—and converted at the same moment! Thus it was that after sixteen years of faithful labor the missionary had made his first Tibetan convert.
Later on both husband and wife attended the mission where they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

About a year after this, Mr. Plymire was working on the chapel roof one day. He was startled by someone trying to attract his attention. Looking down, he saw a husky young Tibetan smiling up at him. The young fellow was dressed in a purple robe trimmed with fur; on his head was an elegant hat of fox skin. From his red silk girdle hung a sheathed silver sword.

"Come down and let us get acquainted," called the man, flashing a friendly smile.

The missionary hurried down the ladder, curious and eager to meet this stranger in the gaudy dress. He faced the man expectantly.

"I am Ga Lo, chief of the Kantsa tribe," explained the man, bowing respectfully.

The missionary was dumbfounded. Before him was the leader of one of the largest and wildest tribes in Northeastern Tibet. Mr. Plymire had heard of their fearlessness; for they had driven out a small army sent in to subdue them. Outsiders feared even to venture near their tribal territory. Yet here was their chief, visiting the missionary of his own accord. It was unbelievable.

The two men engaged in conversation for some time. When the chief left, it was with the promise that he would return. Evidently much pleased with his visit, as soon as he had made his departure, he sent an aide with half a sheep as a gift to his new white friend.

It was not until the fall of 1926 that Ga Lo came again. He was polite and pleasant; but he wanted to speak with the missionary alone.

"You have been my friend for some time now," be-
gan the great chief, “and I believe I can trust you. So I want our friendship to have a stronger bond.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“Among us Tibetans there is a custom,” confided the chief, “a custom observed by those who wish to have the strongest possible human bond between them. We do not permit an outsider to make this covenant with us until we are sure that he is one whom we can trust and be proud to have as a member of our tribe. We call this the blood covenant.”

“What do we do?” asked Mr. Plymire, not a little puzzled.

“We will meet with several of our priests,” explained Ga Lo. “While they witness the act and chant to the gods, we will stand facing each other. Then you will take a knife and cut your wrist, and I will do the same to mine. While the blood is flowing we will hold our wrists together and our blood will mix. You will then be my Tibetan brother and I will protect you with my own life. Because of this covenant you will be able to travel anywhere in my tribe and no one will harm you.”

This surprising offer must not be taken lightly. It had taken a long time for the missionary to win this man’s confidence. If he were not careful now in his reply, all his efforts to win the chief for Christ might be lost. Mr. Plymire had no fear of the knife wounds. But the heathen nature of the ritual was clearly in contradiction to the gospel he preached. He must not identify himself with heathenism, no, not in any way. That would defeat his ultimate purpose. And it would be sin. He must refuse the blood covenant.

“I am a Christian,” he spoke at last. Then, looking the Tibetan square in the face, he continued: “Wheth-
er there is an agreement or not, I will always be true to my word. I will never betray you.”

Strangely, the chief was not offended. Instead, he seemed greatly moved by the missionary’s explanation. He admired him because he lived his religion. They shook hands in parting:

“I want you to come and visit my tribe,” Ga Lo said. “I want you to tell my people about your religion. I think it is good, and they should know about it. But be sure to let me know a few days in advance of your coming so that we can arrange for your protection and no one will harm you.”

With considerable emotion the missionary watched the great Tibetan ride away into the mountains to his tent home some eighty miles west of Tangar. Someday he would repay the chief’s visit, taking with him the message of God’s own Blood Covenant.

With Chief Ga Lo’s invitation, the doors of northeastern Tibet had virtually swung wide open.

Not only would this entire area be safe for the missionary, but in addition news had come that the wild Go Lok tribe at the great bend of the Yellow River were inviting him to bring them the gospel. His joy knew no bounds.

That winter the Plymires saved from their personal allowances every possible penny, plus the offerings which came in letters from friends, for the expenses of the great work ahead in the spring. The New Year dawned, and the future of missions in Tibet never looked brighter.

Suddenly, dark clouds began to gather, rolling in across the distant mountains of opportunity. By the mercy and love of God, the darkest cloud of all was still out of sight.
7. Death’s Dark Valley

The internal troubles which had plagued China for so long had abated to a degree when new difficulties, involving foreign nations, arose. The Chinese people, believing that their own national interests were endangered, prepared to defend themselves. As the situation worsened, war between China and the major powers seemed imminent. Because of all this, all foreign personnel were advised to leave the country. The Plymires, too, received word that they should evacuate.

Immediately they became greatly concerned—not for themselves but for the work among the Tibetans. How their friends had prayed, and how they had worked to see the closed doors of Tibet open to the gospel! Now that they were on the verge of success, they could not think of giving up.

After much prayer the Plymires felt that God had spoken His guidance to their hearts. If Tibet was ever
to have the gospel it must be now. For safety's sake, Mrs. Plymire and little John would return at once to America. But Mr. Plymire would attempt to cross Tibet with the gospel message. It would be a very difficult and dangerous journey—one which no missionary had ever completed.

With these plans in mind, the Plymires prepared to go their separate ways, little realizing how soon, and in what manner that separation was to come about.

During the first week of January, 1927 a local resident of Tangar died of the dreaded disease, smallpox. Within a few short days several more had died. On the night of January 9th, the Plymires' little son John suddenly became very ill with fever and pain. At first they did not guess the nature of the illness, but very soon their fears had become fact: the little boy had smallpox. What followed is told by a lonely, heartbroken missionary in a letter to his sister in America:

"During the next three days there was some fever and pain. We were always comforted in prayer, but the sickness did not leave him. On the third day the smallpox appeared, turning dark almost immediately. We prayed so earnestly for the dear little boy—but Jesus wanted him. During the first seven days of the child's illness my dear wife never spared herself. We prayed together. We watched together. On the seventh day she had to give up: the smallpox had broken out on her also!

"My dear wife and little boy lay there in separate rooms. I did all I knew how for them. I would pray with one, then with the other. When I could get away a few moments, I would go and cry to God. But our loving Father let me know His will for them. My
heart was broken. Yet I did not give up—I hoped and pleaded till the very last.

"On January 20th at 8:30 in the morning, Jesus took our boy to be with Him. He was so patient during those days. He always helped me so nicely as I bathed him and changed his clothes. Then he would ask me to tell him stories—he never tired listening to the stories of Jesus and Samuel. In soft sweet whispers, before he went to be with Jesus he told me he loved Jesus. A little later he said softly, 'Daddy, Jesus loves me... I have no more pain.' This was the last he said—then he was gone. How should I tell my wife what had happened? But God helped me, and a little later I helped her into his room to have one last look at little John...."

After assisting his wife back to her room, Mr. Plymire returned to his son's room to prepare the body for burial. From unfinished boards he nailed together a small box. Then with heavy heart the father lifted the frail body from the bed and placed it in the crude casket. With his own hands he nailed down the lid.

Anti-foreign feeling was running high, and no one would sell the missionary a burial plot. Finally, with a bitter ache in his heart, the father dug a small grave in the garden beside the house. His letter continues:

"While a short service was being held in the front yard by a Christian Chinese, my dear wife and I stood by, our hearts crushed. Then I helped lower our dear little boy into the grave.

"After this I was with my wife constantly. During these last days many were the times I would kneel by my wife and together we would pour out our hearts before the Lord. Many times there was relief, and at all times there was perfect victory. Frequently there
"On January 29th I followed these two dear ones to a lonely spot on the Tibetan Mountains."
was a 'praise the Lord' from her lips—yes, right from her very heart.

"On the morning of January 27th we had our last little talk. We read together from the Word. We sang our last hymn together: 'My Anchor Holds.' She asked me to help her sit up. For a very short time she rested in this position, then she began to sing in such sweet tones, 'Jesus Is Coming for Me.' Then her head fell against my right arm: the very dearest on earth to me had gone to be with Jesus."

Within the same week the missionary had lost the two who were the closest to him. Now he was alone in Death's Valley. Only God knew of the darkness, the desolate feeling that swept over him.

A Chinese Christian kindly went to the carpenter's shop and bought a casket which was brought back to the mission station. With one long, last look Mr. Plymire lifted his wife's body from the bed and placed it in the rough coffin. As he nailed down the lid, each stroke of the hammer plunged him deeper and deeper into the dark valley. There seemed to be no relief for his despair of soul or the awful sense of loneliness.

The last nail in place, Victor Plymire stood dejectedly, hammer in hand, bent beneath a load of grief such as few men have to bear. Far out in the mountains of Tibet only God heard the quiet sobs which arose from the emptiness of that dreary room. And only God understood the sorrow of His servant that day.

The next morning a sympathetic Chinese friend came to offer the missionary a piece of ground out on the mountainside northwest of town. The missionary was to accept the small plot as a gift. Together with some hired help, Mr. Plymire went out to dig the grave. The ground was frozen so hard that by the
time they had made one excavation it was decided to place both of the coffins in the same grave.

Back at the mission the little boy's casket was dug from the garden and, together with his mother's, was borne on the shoulders of some young men out to the final resting place. There was no sound except the whistling of the bitter winter wind as it whipped across the barren ridges of the mountainside.

"On January 29th," the letter continues, "I followed my two loved ones to this lonely spot on the Tibetan mountains. My dear wife and little boy were placed in one grave. Why these dear ones were called away I do not know. I do not question. They were so earnest in trying to evangelize this vast region. . . . It is so very hard in the natural: now entirely alone. For several years we prayed for help. . . . We begged for someone to help my wife in the work and to be a companion while I was out among the Tibetans. But no one came. Has someone failed God?"
8. Into the Unknown

The flood of sorrow passed. The dark clouds were below now and the missionary stood above them more determined than ever to do the will of God. His wife and son had been taken to a far better home than he could have sent them to. For them there would be no more suffering and privation. Their work was finished. But for Victor Plymire the greatest venture of his life was about to begin.

Since all foreigners were being asked to leave China and there was the possibility that they might never be allowed to return, Mr. Plymire feared that the interior regions of Tibet would never receive the gospel message. Feeling the urgency of the hour, he began preparations for an undertaking in which no missionary had yet succeeded, though a few had tried. He was going to take this gospel message clear across Tibet.

To carry the necessary baggage the missionary bought
forty-seven yaks. These are large, ox-like animals with long shaggy hair, famous for their endurance and ability to keep going over rough terrain. The yaks were sent out to the mountains to graze until they were needed.

Next was the food problem. There would be only two or three places along the entire journey where even the barest of Tibetan necessities could be found. The amount of provision required must therefore be very carefully estimated for only the most necessary items would be carried. The missionary and his men were to eat the same food as the Tibetans. Accordingly seventy-five pounds of native butter were bought. After the extraneous matter had been removed from it, the butter was washed and packed into two, leather-bound, wooden boxes. Next, five hundred pounds of roasted barley flour were measured into leather bags and secured. Strips of dried, raw meat were stuffed into sacks. A few pounds of wheat flour for baking bread or making noodles were included. Several pounds of salt and tea were sacked. Then there were a few delicacies: dried radishes, onions, and apricots, and a pound of American candy.

The most important item of packing was left until the last. Into leather-bound boxes went seventy-four thousand gospels and New Testaments. Also included were forty thousand simply-worded tracts. Except for a small portion printed in the Mongolian tongue, all of the literature was in Tibetan.

During the time of these packing operations Mr. Plymire suffered a great deal from rheumatism. But he refused to be deterred from his task, feeling certain that it was God's will for him to attempt the journey.

On the eve of departure the missionary climbed once
more to the grave out on the mountainside. Memories of a small son and of a companion whose prayers were now silenced, flooded his heart. Lonely though he was, he was not without hope. His loved ones were gone, but only for a little while. He would surely see them again. He lifted his eyes from the grave at his feet to face the glorious rays of the setting sun, dipping now below the western mountains. Beyond those mountains were Tibetans who had no hope. He would go to share his hope with them. His determination is evident from the words of that day’s entry in his diary:

“Until the farthest nook and corner of Tibet has heard the call of God and the story of redemption in Christ, my task is not complete. Until the last man has heard the gospel witness, my work is not done.”

The historic journey began at six o’clock on the morning of May 18th, 1927. Accompanied by two Tibetans and three Chinese, Victor Plymire rode out of Tangar toward the mountains in the west. A few miles from town they were joined by the caravan of forty-seven yaks which had been brought in and loaded the day before. A little farther on, as the evangelistic expedition entered the mountains, the town of Tangar behind them slipped from view.

The close of the first day found the missionary and his men camped in the shadows of a great snow-capped range. Their supper was a simple meal prepared in an iron pot over a fire of dried roots and yak manure. They had cooked some noodles with dried meat and onions.

On this first day five Tibetan families in this sparsely populated region had been visited. A gospel had been left with each family head. Reflecting on this and
looking ahead to the coming days, the missionary wrote in his diary:

"Through this trip, O Lord, let me touch as many lives as possible for Thee; and every life I touch do Thou by Thy Spirit quicken—whether through the word I speak, the prayer I breathe, or the life I live."

The expedition had not gone far before it ran into its first obstacle: a 13,000-foot pass. For two days men and beasts labored up the snow-covered slopes toward the summit. The exhausted yaks could scarcely make headway through the snow. Several of them fell under their loads, utterly spent. Yet in spite of the difficulties the missionary was happy. That day six more Tibetan families had received the gospel witness.

Descending the pass, the caravan followed the barren route across the sand dunes east of Lake Ko Ko Nor. For eight miles the cumbersome yaks floundered through the sand. At the end of four hours the expedition arrived on the lake shore. Here they retired for the night with the sound of heavy breakers drumming in their ears. Early in the morning all were rudely awakened by a tremendous rumbling from the mountains to the east. An earthquake followed. All thoughts of sleep were forgotten as the animals were quickly loaded with supplies and equipment. Under way in a few minutes, the expedition struck out across a sand bar spanning the lake at that point.

On the south shore of the lake the prospect was more pleasing. The tired animals found plenty of good grass. The missionary lost no time shooting a few of the abundant water fowl for the needs of the party. Moving across the grassy plain the caravan passed scores of tents each day. Within a four-day period Mr. Plymire visited no less than one hundred and seventy of these
tents, leaving a gospel witness and a gospel portion in each.

Civilization was left far behind as the party moved on. Wild asses and antelope grazed with sheep and yaks; overhead huge eagles and vultures circled lazily in the sky. Frequently a marmot or rabbit would scamper for cover as the missionary's Tibetan dog romped about. Occasionally a lone wolf would prowl near, then slink off out of sight.

Trading some of his tired animals for fresh ones, Mr. Plymire led his caravan away from the lake and into the mountains to the southwest. From a camp in these mountains he wrote to his parents:

“This will likely be my last letter till I reach India.... Thus far the Lord has blessed me. I am troubled some with rheumatism but God has wonderfully helped me. I expect Him to heal me completely.... We have had nice weather now for the past day and a half and I hope it continues for some days as we have already been delayed beyond my plans, and our food supplies may run short.... I have tried to give the gospel so that all may hear it at least once....”

This letter was dated June 5, 1927. Carried back to Tangar by one of the Chinese it was the last word received from Mr. Plymire for eight long months. During those months only God knew where he was.

The missionary now met the first resistance to his mission. Coming upon several tents he tried to engage the people in conversation and give them some gospel literature. They would not receive it and suggested that the messenger go on his way. He tried to reason with them but they would not listen, so he went on, feeling that he had done his best.

The expedition came down now out of the mountains
to begin the long trek across the desertlike plain surrounding the great salt lake known as Dali Dabasu. It is a very desolate stretch of territory. There was very little water in the few small streams which emptied into the lake. Grass was almost nonexistent. The animals had to feed on a low thorny bush which grew everywhere. Each time the caravan moved on there was but a slim chance that it might find water at the end of the stage.

On the shores of Dali Dabasu lies the small settlement of Tsa Ka. Here the party found a few Tibetans and Mongols eking out a bare existence. And it was here that the missionary was met and welcomed by a young Mongolian prince who invited him into his yurt for a simple meal. Mr. Plymire was thankful for this genuine expression of oriental hospitality; before leaving he was able to present the young man with a New Testament. This seemed to please the prince a great deal and he promised to read it.

Bidding his new friend good-bye the missionary led his caravan on across the burning, sun-baked desert. The expedition dragged itself across the hot plains for five weary days. Finding water in stagnant, scum-covered pools and sink holes, men and animals managed to keep going.

On one occasion the yaks and horses were twenty hours without a drop of water. One of the yaks died of exhaustion. On another day the expedition met two men on foot, without money and half-starved. Though his own resources were so limited, the missionary was constrained to give each of them a little barley meal and a few matches for lighting camp fires. Other than these two starving travelers, not another sign of human life was visible that day.
Yet during these five miserable days twenty families were visited and given the gospel for the first time. “We had tea with them and spent some time talking with these Tibetans about salvation,” comments Mr. Plymire in his diary. “When we departed we left a gospel at each tent.”

Resuming the journey, the caravan arrived at the eastern tip of the great Tsai Dam swamp of Northeastern Tibet. To cross this expanse of wilderness was one of the most trying experiences of the entire trip. One day it would be an impassable bog, the next day a burning desert.

In the hope of finding water, the expedition broke camp at three in the morning of the first day, anxious to make camp again before the sun became too hot. However, the stream where they thought there would be water proved to be only a dry bed. Forced to go on, the caravan now had to traverse a series of low, sandy hills. For sixteen long hours more, men and animals struggled on while the sun blazed down from a merciless sky.

Late that afternoon Mr. Plymire, who had been riding ahead, came across a stagnant pool covered with scum and mosquitoes. Mosquitoes or not, he must drink. Getting down on hands and knees the missionary blew the insects back and drank deeply of the filthy water. On this awful day the animals had been twenty-two hours without water. One of the men had had none for twenty-seven. Three of the yaks died in the sand hills.

In desperation, two of the men were sent to search for someone who might have animals for hire, to carry the loads the dead yaks had left. It was in answer to prayer that they returned toward evening with six
camels in tow, and accompanied by a Mongol. Without this man's assistance the evangelistic expedition could have gone no farther.

Still, two more nightmarish days passed before there was much relief.

Once the caravan had left the Tsai Dam behind, it moved into the Mongolian district of Dzun. Here the missionary met increasing numbers of people who were kind and hospitable. The Mongois welcomed the expedition and the gospel. While they listened to the old, old story for the first time, they entertained Mr. Plymire and his men with such delicacies as camel's milk and camel cheese.

The prince of Dzun, a fine young man of about twenty-five, was very friendly, offering the missionary the best of everything he had. He invited him into his tent for long conversations on salvation, and accepted a New Testament as a parting gift from the missionary, who earnestly hoped that he had made some impression on this young leader.

A religious fair was going on in the district and all family heads were required to attend. This was too good an opportunity to miss, so the missionary remained in the area for eight days, riding or walking from one place to another, and witnessing to these nomads of the high Tibetan plateau. So that none of his precious tracts and gospels should be wasted, Mr. Plymire made sure that each person who received the literature could read. When he had finished his witnessing, there were indeed few of the Dzun Mongols who could say that they had never heard of Christ.
9. The Worsening Trail

It was July the first. The missionary bade his Dzun friends farewell and set out to cross the remainder of the torturous Tsai Dam. To save his own animals as much as possible, he had again hired camels to aid the tired yaks. Four days south of Dzun the expedition crossed the great, barren mountains of Burhan Buddha.

They began the climb at six in the morning. The loaded animals made slow headway up the rough, steep slopes. Two of the yaks gave out completely. Several of the others staggered and fell under their burdens. The high pass was reached at last, nevertheless, and camp was pitched by a small spring a short distance down the opposite side of the mountain. Here both men and beasts tried to regain a little of their strength.

At Danza Obo, a lonely shrine built up of yak bones, rocks and brush, the caravan stopped for a day's rest. From now on the missionary would be on his own, for
the hired camels, with their owners, left him at this point, having come as far as they had agreed. If any of his animals should become exhausted, there would be no further replacements. So, while the yaks grazed, worn saddles were repaired and the loads reorganized in order that the weaker animals might carry less.

A no-man's-land stretch of territory extended before them for almost two hundred and fifty miles. The only people they would see there would be pilgrims, or the robbers who hide along the route to molest the unfortunate traveler. At the end of the first dreary day a pack of wolves watched as the tents were pitched, and howled their hunger far into the night.

Several days later the caravan followed the trail into a narrow gorge: the bed of a dry stream. A long stretch of the gorge was strewn with the bones of pack-animals which had died from exhaustion. Two of the missionary's own yaks had given out and had had to be unloaded. He could not help but wonder what would become of his caravan.

Gradually the canyon floor became a steep incline, leading up interminably to the pass, fifteen thousand feet above sea level. Yet the height was attained at last and the weary caravan pitched camp shortly after the pass had been crossed.

As the men cooked their meat that night they experienced the inconvenience of high-altitude cooking. When the meat had boiled the usual amount of time it was taken up and served. But it was so tough they could barely chew it. They tossed it back into the kettle and boiled it again. Seemingly, it was tougher! Fearing what might happen as the result of further boiling, the men spent the rest of the evening slowly
chewing the meat, a little at a time. Tea and barley flour made an appropriate dessert.

Early one morning the caravan was moving along peacefully. Suddenly one of the horses stepped into a bog and in no time was up to his belly in the black mire. Quickly the rest of the animals were herded in another direction while some of the men, at the risk of their lives, proceeded to rescue the unfortunate creature. To lose a yak was bad enough; the loss of a horse would be a major catastrophe. Working frantically the men finally lifted and pulled the poor beast from the bog. In spite of such difficulties, Mr. Plymire could still see the bright side. That night he concluded his record for the day as follows:

"We found good grass for the animals and roots we could use for fuel. Sunshine a great part of the day. First day without rain for four days. A beautiful evening. Praise God!"

A few days later the missionary sighted his first wild yak. Six feet high at the shoulder and weighing well over two thousand pounds, the wild yak is monarch of the roof of the world. On rough terrain he can overtake a horse, in spite of his size. His thick hide is a sure defense against the round shot the Tibetans use in most of their hunting.

Quite unaware of the formidable nature of this beast, Mr. Plymire set out to provide his men with wild yak steak. Ka Zong, a Tibetan, accompanied him and it was well that he went along for in a short while the missionary would need him.

Out of sight of the huge bull, the two men moved toward it. When they could no longer remain hidden, Mr. Plymire opened fire. He missed. To his surprise, the beast turned and made straight for the two men.
The missionary fired again and missed. His third shot found its mark, halting the huge yak momentarily. Discovering to his alarm that he had only one cartridge left, Mr. Plymire feared to use it lest he should miss or merely wound the already maddened beast. A nearby hole offered refuge until Ka Zong could run for more ammunition. Meanwhile the big yak, forgetting that he had been hit, resumed his grazing.

When Ka Zong returned Mr. Plymire prepared to fire again. Somehow, before he was ready to shoot, he attracted the beast’s attention. Without a moment’s hesitation the wild creature came thundering down upon his assailant. Fumbling desperately, Mr. Plymire managed to get a cartridge in place and pulled the trigger. If he missed this time, the game would be up. Two badly frightened men watched as the huge animal came to a halt when only fifty yards from them—and fell dead.

The great occasion was celebrated with a full course meal: wild yak meatballs, dried radishes, noodles and wild onions. The hungry men feasted as they had not for a long time. They even shared their bounty with a Tibetan priest who had been following the caravan for some time.

After the priest had eaten his fill he began to chant in a strange guttural tone which aroused the missionary’s curiosity.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m saying prayers,” the priest replied, “in behalf of the dead yak’s departing spirit so that it may be rightly directed in taking up its abode in the next life.”

While the animals rested for a day the men made boots from the thick hide of the wild yak. But these
boots were not for their feet; they were for the feet of the pack animals whose hoofs were wearing out on the sharp rocks.

As the sun set, a snowstorm blew in across the mountains forcing the men to retire early. Mr. Plymire awoke in the morning to find that an inch of snow had been deposited on him while he slept. Loading the yaks was a more difficult task than usual, as each animal was coated with a thin layer of snow-covered ice.

The snow soon melted and the caravan continued on its way across the grasslands. The outward prospects seemed bright. In the missionary’s heart there was a keen desire for deeper fellowship with his Master. This is evident from a few lines of his entry for the day:

“There is an intense longing in my heart for a deeper spiritual life with Him, and He will satisfy I am sure.”

Soon he would be meeting Tibetans again: men and women who had no knowledge of a God who loved them. More than anything the missionary wanted them to know God’s love. In order to tell them, he needed to know God better himself. He wanted to be filled with the compassion of Christ for the souls of Tibetans.

On August 4th the caravan caught sight of the great Dri River as it sparkled in the sun. Flowing southeast out of Tibet it enters China as the Yang Tze Kiang. Obviously the fording of this stream would be a major undertaking; for at that point, it was 300 feet wide, flowing very swiftly.

Early the next morning Mr. Plymire arose to watch another caravan as it attempted to make the crossing. Entering the water the animals were immediately swept off their feet and commenced drifting down
stream, only their heads showing. The loads were completely submerged.

Running back to camp, Mr. Plymire had his yaks unloaded. There was no use trying to cross. Food supplies would be ruined to say nothing of the boxes of literature. All day he rode up and down the riverbank looking for a shallow spot but each time he entered the waters they were so deep that his horse went under. An all-night rain complicated matters, and toward noon the next day melting snows from the mountains caused another rise in the already swollen stream.

The caravan could not wait indefinitely. Each added day took from the meager supply of food. The missionary entered his tent to lift his heart in prayer, asking God to do the impossible and cause the river to recede.

After the noon meal Mr. Plymire walked to the river's edge for a look. The waters had receded noticeably. Hurrying back to camp he had the animals prepared to make the crossing. When all was ready he went to have another look. The swollen stream had dropped almost to normal! The loads were ferried across on horseback; then the yaks with their saddles were herded into the stream. By 7:30 that evening all the loads and every animal were safely over. Not a load had been so much as dampened.

"I must record a word of real heart praise and gratitude to God," the missionary wrote in his diary, "for helping us to cross this river. He was so faithful to His promise. No doubt the very rapid drop of the river was due to His answering our faint and feeble, but earnest call to Him. Truly I praise God from my innermost being."
Four days later Mr. Plymire spotted the first Tibetan tents he had seen for almost a month. Accordingly he had the caravan stop while he went from tent to tent to witness for Christ.

One afternoon, while encamped near these friendly Tibetans, Mr. Plymire's attention was suddenly drawn to a group of men riding hurriedly toward him. There were four men, all armed with swords and rifles.

Reining their horses to a halt, the men dismounted and walked over to where the missionary was standing. "We represent Goma Kushuk, chief of the territory you are about to enter," declared the leader. "He has ordered us to search your baggage and to find out your reason for coming here."

Mr. Plymire was disturbed by the actions of these strangers. And their story did not seem convincing to him. If they were robbers they were running true to form for already they had begun to go through the leather bags and boxes.

When they had finished, the strangers engaged the missionary in a lengthy conversation concerning religion and the way to find God. With quiet interest they listened as Mr. Plymire explained the simple story of salvation. Finally the leader announced that they would have to leave the camp. Thinking he might not see these men again, the missionary went into his tent and returned with a New Testament for the captain of the group and a gospel for each of his men.

"I want you to read these carefully," he said. "They will tell you more about this Christian way."

The four men thanked him politely and, mounting their horses, rode off into the mountains, leaving Mr. Plymire to wonder just who they really were.

Moving south, the expedition camped in the foot-
hills of the Tang La mountains about thirty miles from Tang pass—one of the most difficult on the route to Lhasa. Both men and animals rested for a day to gain strength for the rough climb ahead. Without warning the four strangers of yesterday appeared, seemingly from nowhere.

"That book you gave me yesterday is very good!" the captain shouted, without dismounting from his horse. And almost without stopping the four horsemen galloped away and disappeared in the hills. The missionary was pleased—the Word of God was taking effect with these strangers too.

Several of the yaks had developed saddle sores. This posed a real problem, for Mr. Plymire had no medicines for such purposes. One of the Tibetans volunteered a treatment he knew of.

"It is very simple," the Tibetan explained. "I will find a few dry bones, make some ashes from them and apply them to the sores. They will soon be healed."

"Very well, go ahead and do what you can."

While one of the men washed the sores, Ka Zong went in search of the bones. He soon returned with a human skull and other fragments. Burning the skull black, he took two stones and ground the charred bone to a powder. He then sprinkled the powder on the sores. The crude remedy did no harm—at least there were no aftereffects such as often follow these primitive cures.

For two days the caravan labored up the towering incline to the pass. A pelting rain turned to snow as the altitude increased, making progress most difficult. After several hours of stumbling upward through the deep snow, one final effort brought the party over the last rocky slope and onto the summit, 16,300 feet above
sea level. Fortunately there was very little descent as the pass led out to a high plateau. Slipping and sliding down the short slope, the animals came to a halt, too exhausted to go further. Rain and snow had turned the plateau into a mass of slush.

For two days the men had eaten very little. There was no dry dung to make fire for cooking. Hunger pangs were making them desperate and something must be done at once. As a last resort Mr. Plymire cut up one of the pack saddles and made a fire. After a frugal meal they retired for the night. The missionary lay wondering how many more days like this one he and his men could endure.

Two days later the desperate situation worsened. The missionary was forced to get rid of one of the horses—it was too far gone for use anyway. He also traded a worn-out yak for a few pounds of butter to replenish their dwindling supplies. When the expedition started out again it traveled through deep snow.

Another Tibetan encampment of black tents came into view several days later. While the weary animals rested the missionary would make an opportunity to contact these people with the gospel. No sooner had the tents been pitched than curious nomads began to gather. They were wild-looking men, watching the missionary's every move. Overcoming their timidity, they inquired,

"Who are you? Where are you from? What are you doing here?"

The missionary patiently answered each question—particularly the last. With inexplicable joy he explained the way of salvation to these poor souls who had never heard of a God who loved them. Over and
over he repeated the story of redemption through Christ. They listened intently—eagerly—like hungry children. When he had finished, he presented each man with a gospel, encouraging him to read it while tending his sheep or riding across the great plateau.
Mongolians of the Dzun district preparing food on hearths which have been dug in the ground. In the background are two yurts, Mongol dwellings.

The evangelistic expedition making camp after having crossed the Burkhan Buddha Mountains.
Mr. Plymire's caravan fording the dangerous and swift current of the Dri River.

One of the wild yaks which Mr. Plymire shot to provide meat for the expedition.
Camp No. 77 at Tso Mo Ra in central Tibet. The men are seated around the sod hearth waiting for the water to boil.
10. The Jaws of Death

The missionary watched as the Tibetan nomads made their way home. Across the landscape sheep were grazing, dotting the plain in every direction. How like these with whom he had just been speaking! he thought. They too were sheep, scattered across the vastness of this rugged land, and without a shepherd.

Just as he was about to enter his tent once more, he noticed some men coming across the plateau toward him. He waited, prepared to extend a warm greeting. As they came near he recognized some of them as men he had met earlier in the day. Why had they returned so soon? And why were they sullen and silent now, and apparently worried about something. Mr. Plymire waited for them to speak first. After some moments one of the men took the missionary aside and confided solemnly that they had some urgent mat-
ters to tell him—something important that he should know. Mr. Plymire faced the group:

"Well, what is it you have to tell me?" he asked calmly.

The bolder looking of the men addressed the missionary. "We want you to know that Goma Kushuk is sending some of his men to find you and kill you."

Mr. Plymire faced the Tibetans squarely, not a little shaken by the news they brought. "But I—I don't understand," he said. "I have already seen some of his men and they made no attempt to harm me."

"Well, we just wanted to let you know what we have heard," one of them offered. "We believe that you are in danger."

The men did not stay. Alone once more, the missionary fell upon his knees to pray. That night he found it difficult to sleep. Somehow he knew that these men had told him the truth.

The next day a group of well-armed Tibetans rode up to inform him that he should go no further until he heard from Goma Kushuk.

Once more the missionary prayed for guidance. He could not understand what had happened to bring about this threat to his life and the lives of his men. Until now he had been kindly treated and had encountered no real opposition. Was this an attempt to frighten him so that he would turn back and give up his plans to travel further into Tibet?

While Mr. Plymire was wondering what to do, No Ga, one of his Tibetan helpers came to him to say that he knew Goma Kushuk. He offered to go to see the chief in the hope that he might persuade him to allow the missionary to proceed on his way. No Ga was not yet a Christian; but he liked the missionary.
This was a brave offer on his part; and it nearly cost him his life.

When No Ga left he carried two letters written by Mr. Plymire. One was addressed to Goma Kushuk, the other to the Dalai Lama, god-king of Tibet, who lived in Lhasa the capital. In the latter letter, Mr. Plymire had requested permission to visit the forbidden city, permission which—if granted—would make him the first missionary to have set foot in that holy city of Buddhism.

Early on the morning of August 13th No Ga returned from Shiabden Gonpa, the small monastery near which Goma Kushuk lived. No Ga brought with him orders from the chief that the white man and his men were to come immediately. He wanted to see them—the white man in particular.

Accordingly, the small caravan set forward early the following day, southward toward Shiabden Gonpa. The missionary was much encouraged over the number of Tibetans along the way who gladly listened to his witness. One day several Tibetans called at his tent door, asking for the books and gospels they had heard he was giving away. Once a passing priest stopped for a chat. After a conversation with Mr. Plymire he told the people gathered round that the books they had received were very good indeed. Hearing this, one of the women who had refused a book earlier, returned to receive it. Another day the missionary was visited by the chief of Hor Chi district, a man who had no less than eighty-five thousand subjects. Upon departing, the chief gave Mr. Plymire a present of rice, dried milk, barley meal and a few pounds of butter. When he rode off, a New Testament was tucked away in the folds of his garment.
The journey to Shiabden Gonpa was long and tedious, and beset with many dangers. At last, having arrived within seventeen miles of the city, the missionary sent his man No Ga to ask Goma Kushuk where he wanted the expedition to make camp. It was then, on the fifth day of September, that Mr. Plymire received his first warning of the real trouble which lay ahead. The crafty chief advised him that he should make camp where he was; then proceed alone to see him. This word arrived late in the day.

Suddenly realizing the possibility of a trap, the missionary retired to his tent to pray. He had two courses of action from which he must choose. He could turn back. Or he could walk on, into what appeared like the very jaws of death. What was he to do?

After prayer, he had the answer. He must not turn back. He had come this far; he must now trust God to take him the rest of the way. If it should be God’s will for him to die in the land of his calling and for the sake of the people whom he loved, he was ready.

So it was that on that fateful day Mr. Plymire set out with No Ga and Ka Zong, his faithful Tibetan friends, to obey the chief’s orders. He was unaware that Goma Kushuk had already gone into action, having called together a Council of Death. The letter from Mr. Plymire, addressed to the Dalai Lama, had never left Shiabden Gonpa. The chief probably feared that his superior might decide to spare the white man’s life. And if the god-king had no knowledge of the white man’s presence, the chief could carry out his intentions without hindrance.

All of this vicious scheming had not gone unnoticed by the One who had called Victor Plymire to this isolated place. In the city of Olympia, Wash-
ington lived a Christian woman who was in constant touch with her Lord. This dear old saint could claim no spectacular ministry. Hers was the hidden ministry of prayer. After her usual private devotions at the end of the day, the elderly lady retired for the night.

Though the missionary's letter to the Dalai Lama did not reach the city of Lhasa, God had His own way of informing the Dalai Lama of the presence of Mr. Plymire. A merchant friend, whom the missionary had met on the way, had arrived in the capital and had told others about the white man who was heading for Shiabden Gonpa, about one hundred miles to the north. In a round-about way the Dalai Lama heard of this and, wondering why he had not been officially informed, wrote a letter of reprimand to Goma Kushuk. He warned the chief that if any harm came to the missionary the chief would be executed. To insure quick delivery the letter was sent by a runner, who left Lhasa at the same time that the missionary entered Shiabden Gonpa.

Curious crowds, having heard that there was to be an execution, gaped as the missionary walked into the city. Among them was a Tibetan who recognized Mr. Plymire. Why, this was the man who had washed and dressed his sores a number of years ago, back in Tangar, six hundred miles distant! It troubled him to think that a person so kind as Mr. Plymire must be executed. Should he go to tell Goma Kushuk what the missionary had done for him? But if he thus should seem to oppose the intentions of his chief he feared that he might be executed, too, for his interference, along with the missionary and his men.

A short distance from the great Goma Kushuk's tent Mr. Plymire was met by a delegation from the
Leh, capital of Ladok, a small country bordering western Tibet. Here the evangelistic expedition reached the first outpost of civilization since leaving the town of Tangar.
Goma Kushuk — The Tibetan Chief who attempted to execute Mr. Plymire and two of his Tibetan companions.
chief. Wishing to take the missionary by surprise, these men were careful to say or do nothing which would alarm the white man. The white man was expecting trouble indeed, but was hardly prepared for what confronted him as he entered the large council tent.

Before him on a low platform, clothed in red and yellow satin and wearing a fur hat, sat Goma Kushuk. At the chief’s side stood three bodyguards, dressed in long purple robes tied about with bright red silk girdles. Each of these tall, grim-faced men gripped a glittering steel broadsword. The face of the chief clouded as he fixed his gaze upon the missionary and his two faithful aides.

As lesser officials gathered in catlike silence for the trial, Mr. Plymire and his men seated themselves on the dirt floor. The missionary bowed his head for a moment. He was afraid, yet somehow he knew that the God who had called him to preach to these people would see him through this terrible ordeal. He waited breathlessly.

Across the ocean, in Olympia, Washington, the old prayer-warrior stirred in her sleep. Suddenly she was awake, for a strange sense of urgency came over her. Immediately she asked God to show her the cause. The answer came in such a forceful manner that she would never forget it the rest of her life.

God granted her a vision. It was unbelievable, but very real!

She saw a group of men gathered together in what resembled a tent. They were dressed in long robes of skin or heavy cloth; most of them had a sword tucked in their girdles. More imposing than the rest was a man who sat on a low platform. At his side stood
three men with swords drawn as if ready for use. On the ground sat three other men, two of whom looked like the others. But the third was of a lighter complexion and had on a leather jacket and trousers.

This was indeed strange to behold. She studied the one man intently, wondering who he was. Suddenly she recognized him as a missionary she had heard speak in a church service. He was going to Tibet, the land she had prayed for so long. The old lady had listened as the young missionary told of the hardships and dangers he would encounter in that far-off land. But she could not remember the missionary's name. It was then that the Holy Spirit whispered to her, "Pray for Mr. Plymire. His life is in great danger."

Immediately she fell on her knees to pray, and prayed as only those can who live in vital contact with God. The vision faded, but the woman's effectual, fervent praying persisted.

Back in Tibet, it was Goma Kushuk who finally broke the stony silence. He addressed the two Tibetans first:

"Do you not know that the entry of foreigners into our land will cause much trouble?" he demanded. "By bringing this white man here you have aided an enemy and committed treason. For this you must be executed."

Realizing now that his own life could not possibly be spared, the missionary determined to save his men if possible. He boldly raised a protest:

"Sir, these men are not responsible for my entry into your country," he declared. "Nor are they my guides. I could have come here alone for I knew the way. Kill me if you wish, but let these men go!"

But his words only made the chief more angry if
that were possible. "They helped you, white man, and that is enough. They are to be executed. This is final!"

All of this time the Tibetan bystander who had watched the missionary as he walked past, kept thinking of the injustice being done to his friend. He recalled how Mr. Plymire had helped him and was greatly concerned that this good man should be executed with no one to plead his cause. The man struggled with his fear of the executioner's sword. What should he do? Time was running out. If he were going to intervene it must be quickly. Finally, forgetting his own safety, he strode in the direction of the chief's tent.

At the same time a lone Tibetan runner journeyed rapidly across the bleak landscape toward Shiabden Gonpa. In the folds of his robe was hidden the letter from the Dalai Lama, addressed to Goma Kushuk. It was only a short distance now—and the runner quickened his pace.

Inside the tent Goma Kushuk addressed the missionary:

"Do you not know that foreigners are not welcome in Tibet? Worst of all, you have been introducing a religion contrary to what all Tibetans are taught from childhood. Such actions must be punished, and in such a manner that any others with like ambitions will be effectively deterred."

"Cut off the heads of all three!" decreed the chief.

No Ga and Ka Zong were to be executed first; the white man last. Silence reigned as the three armed guards left their positions beside the chief and moved toward the three helpless prisoners on the floor. Mr.
Plymire and his companions got to their feet, starting toward the door of the tent—and death.

Before they reached the door a commotion had arisen there. The Tibetan bystander had entered the tent. Hurrying through the customary salutations, he explained the reason for his coming: the missionary had helped him years ago, he had washed the man’s sores when he was sick and had offered prayer to his God that the man be spared. Surely such a good and kind person as this white prisoner was not worthy of death.

The man finished speaking and stood silently waiting in hopes that his plea might save the white man’s life. But the chief was adamant: the decision was not changed; the execution must proceed without delay.

Yet in the providence of God the plea from the earnest bystander had taken time enough to allow the runner from Lhasa to arrive on the scene. Rushing into the tent and snatching the letter from his garment, the runner presented it to the chief. There was heavy silence in the tent as Goma Kushuk slowly opened the letter and studied its contents.

As he read, Mr. Plymire noticed the proud look on his face change to one of consternation. Attempting to remain unshaken before his men, the chief continued with the letter until he had finished. It was indeed an embarrassing situation for him. If he permitted the executions to go ahead as ordered it would be only a matter of time until he himself should suffer the same fate. If he obeyed his superior’s orders he would be making a fool of himself.

Deciding that embarrassment was preferable to death, he gruffly addressed the guards: “Release the
white man and his two men! There will be no execution!"

With expressions of surprised disbelief No Ga and Ka Zong followed the missionary out of the tent and out of the jaws of death. On their heels came the Tibetan bystander who appeared not one moment too soon. The runner who had brought the letter from Lhasa had already disappeared.

In Olympia, Washington the elderly woman whose prayers had stormed the Throne of Grace through the dark moments, received assurance that those prayers had been answered. It was months later that Mr. Plymire received a letter from her, telling of her experience in prayer. She described the vision in detail, even enclosing a rough drawing of what she had seen: the chief, the guards, and the prisoners—each one stationed as he had actually appeared—together with a description of each individual's clothing. Mr. Plymire compared the time and discovered to his amazement that his trial was proceeding at the exact hour when the prayer warrior was interceding for him across the ocean. As for her rough sketch he says, "If a photographer had been present he could not have made a more accurate picture of the situation."

Scarcely had the missionary recovered from his harrowing experience when he received an invitation from Goma Kushuk to attend a feast to be held in the missionary's honor. On the surface the invitation was an act of courtesy but the missionary wondered whether the crafty chief might not be using the feast as a device to conceal a less obvious attempt on his life. Did he intend to poison the missionary? It was not without considerable apprehension that Mr. Plymire
made up his mind to go. If there were a plot then God would intervene as before.

At the banquet Mr. Plymire and his men were seated cross-legged on the ground while various dishes of food were placed on the low tables before them. Buttered tea was poured into their bowls. The missionary waited politely for the chief to begin eating but he made no move to do so. Instead Goma Kushuk and his aides waited for his guests to begin. Something seemed to be wrong. Mr. Plymire records the suspense in his diary:

"He told us to go ahead and eat but he and his men refused to eat. We were afraid of poison but if we refused to eat there would be more trouble. So we ate—but with a great deal of suspicion and fear. If the official had eaten with us it would have been different but neither he nor his men would touch a thing. Our faith was tested to the limit."

The missionary prayed as he ate. As the meal progressed the hungry men began to feel somewhat at ease; they ate as they had not eaten for a long time. The meal was finished without incident and no ill effects followed.

Mr. Plymire and his men returned home that night with songs of praise in their hearts for the goodness of the Lord. They were carrying a leather bag filled with barley meal, a dried duck, a leg of mutton and other gifts presented to them by Goma Kushuk—the man who just a short time before had decreed their execution!
11. Mission to Lhasa

The long delay at Shiabden Gonpa, coupled with the very adverse traveling conditions the expedition had encountered, had depleted its resources. What was on hand was insufficient for the rest of the journey. The pack animals were too worn to go farther; there was no money to buy replacements.

Even more distressing was an official request which had come from the Tibetan government, asking Mr. Plymire to take a route through western Tibet instead of the one he had planned. The route he preferred would have taken him south through Lhasa and Gyangtze into Bhutan. The route through western Tibet would require him to travel seven hundred miles farther than he had planned and it led across the most rugged and desolate part of the country. This discouraging picture was made still more drear
by the fact that winter was coming on with its freezing temperatures and blinding blizzards.

Evidently the evangelistic expedition had come to an end. Seeing that he could go no farther, the missionary determined to make one last venture before he turned back: he would carry the gospel to Lhasa, capital of Tibet and sacred city of Buddhism.

Through the centuries this mysterious city had been jealously guarded. None but Tibetans or pilgrims were permitted to come near.

To the explorer, reaching Lhasa has always been considered the height of achievement; very few have ever realized their ambitions. A young English explorer may represent this handful. Disguising himself as a Tibetan servant, he hired a native to play the part of his master and while the hired man rode he followed on foot. To darken his complexion he applied walnut stain to his entire body. Squeezing lemon juice into his eyes darkened the pupils so that they resembled those of a Tibetan.

The explorer lived on a starvation diet and faced death from the elements but he finally reached Lhasa and was privileged to gaze upon the golden roofs of the Dalai Lama's palace. His success was short-lived, however; for he was discovered and forced to leave.

Mr. Plymire was not the only Christian concerned with carrying the gospel to Lhasa. Two Tibetans who had been converted during a visit to India also greatly desired that their fellow countrymen should know of God's gift. While in Lhasa they heard that a missionary was encamped about a hundred miles to the north and that he wished to come to Lhasa but had been forbidden to do so. These two unknown Tibetans began to pray that somehow the missionary would reach
the city. Mr. Plymire never met these two Christians but he did receive a letter from them:

"My dear Sir:

"I and my wife went to Lhasa last year in August. We reached there in September and were there till February. While we were at Lhasa we heard about your arrival at Shiabden Gonpa, and we heard that you had applied to the Tibetan government to let you come to Lhasa. . . . I met some traders coming from Shiabden Gonpa. I inquire from them about you, and they told me that you were distributing books printed in Tibetan. Then I showed them my New Testament and asked, 'Is it the same?' They told me, 'Yes, the same.' Then I was sure that you were a missionary. Then I was praying for you in Lhasa. . . .

"By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ I got very good opportunity to testify for the Saviour individually. I praise the Lord for His wonderful work. Though the land of Tibet is not very opened to the gospel yet, the Lord is doing wonderfully through His chosen messengers. . . .

"I am praying much for Tibet and do hope that in His time the Lord will choose the land for His kingdom.

"We do not know each other personally, yet in Jesus we meet at His feet and have the faith that we shall meet at His feet face to face.

"I feel the coming of the Lord is very near. Let us pray that we may be ready, and work to win souls by the power of the Holy Spirit.

"These will be my last greetings to you.

Yours in His service, . . ."

There is no doubt that the prayers of these two unknown Tibetans had a part in whatever success Mr. Plymire may have achieved.
From this point on little is known of the missionary’s Lhasa itinerary. He left no written account of his trek. Whenever he was asked where he had been his reply was always: “I cannot tell. The men who were my guides might suffer if I told.”

But this much is known: he did leave Shiabden Gonpa in the direction of Lhasa, guided by two men. He followed an unknown trail through the mountains which lie north of the forbidden city. The following facts are all that is positively known:

After leaving Tibet Mr. Plymire wrote a letter to his mother in which he mentioned that he had been within about fifteen miles of Lhasa.

A short time before his death he made this statement to his daughter Mary: “From where I stood we could see the golden palace roof shining in the sun.”

There is a quotation from his diary which reads: “The most interesting part of my trip, made while delayed at Shiabden Gonpa, must remain a secret. Suffice it to say that I carried the gospel where no other had ever been able to go.”

Last is a picture which he had in his collection for many years. It is a picture of Lhasa with the god-king’s palace in the background. The photograph in itself would mean nothing except for the fact that there is a negative to go with it.

Whatever may be deduced from these facts, the important thing is not so much that possibly for the first time in history a missionary succeeded in reaching the forbidden city, but rather that the gospel was carried into another dark corner of Tibet. When he started, Mr. Plymire had with him a package of gospels which he had determined to carry to Lhasa. He returned without the package.
The Potala—Palace of the Dalai Lama, god king of Tibet, located in Lhasa—forbidden city and capital of Tibet.

Mr. Plymire’s camp at Gartok in western Tibet.
A group of Tibetans met by the evangelistic expedition on the high plateau of West-central Tibet.
A few Tibetans visited during a lull in the nine-day blizzard. In some spots the expedition had to wade through waist-deep snow.
Back at Shiabden Gonpa, Victor Plymire prepared for the inevitable. Though he could not bear the thought of giving up, it seemed plain that he must return. A heavy snow already covered the high plateau. As though threatening to blow them away, an icy wind tore at the missionary’s tents.

Listening to the wild wind as it moaned across the desolate highland, he sat thinking. If he did give up, there was still a large area of Tibet that would never receive the Christian message. Many Tibetans for whom Christ died would never know of salvation by grace. Once more at the crossroads, the messenger did what he had so often done before: he asked God to make it clear which road he should take. The answer came unmistakably. He wrote in his diary:

“I thought of turning back—deep snows—hunger—suffering. But God said, ‘Forward.’ He who took me
thus far, will He not take me through?”

Though the obstacles ahead still loomed ominously, the missionary was now convinced that God would open the way, even by a miracle if necessary. And almost immediately seemingly miraculous events began to occur.

Goma Kushuk received another letter from the Dalai Lama. He was ordered to send the missionary on his way at once, providing him with pack animals as long as he was in the chief’s territory. He was instructed to sell to the missionary all of the barley meal required, and at half price. This was extremely galling to the old chief. However he could not but obey, for the orders came from one who could punish him severely for failure to comply.

The same runner who brought the message for Goma Kushuk brought one for Mr. Plymire. In this letter the god-king commended the missionary for his friendly behavior and advised him that all of the chiefs along the proposed route had been commanded to hire their pack animals to him for his journey through each respective district. Moreover, they were to lend him whatever other assistance might be necessary.

With this answer to prayer the expedition’s major threat—insufficient supplies—was removed. However, Mr. Plymire still had to reckon with the rugged trek before him. There were yet many wind-swept plateaus to cross and frozen streams to ford. The highest passes were still ahead. There was the constant fear of being caught in a Tibetan blizzard, far from aid or shelter.

But none of these things could now deter this intrepid messenger of the Cross. He called his men into his tent to tell them of his plans. No Ga and Ka Zong would go on with him; the other three would return
to Tangar. Should the expedition run out of food, it was better for him and his two faithful aides to perish. None of them had family responsibilities.

Carefully estimating the amount of barley meal he and his two men would need, Mr. Plymire bought it from the now obedient Goma Kushuk. He packed several pounds of butter into a leather-bound box and loaded the yaks for the journey.

On the day when the bitter, one-thousand mile trek to the western border of Tibet began—November third—Mr. Plymire wrote these brief, but enlightening words in his diary:

"I did not like the thought of having to separate and leave these faithful men, especially my old yak driver who had given his heart to Jesus some weeks ago. I commended them to the grace and keeping of God and we were off."

An unkind wind lashed the missionary and his men with frozen particles as they followed the yaks through the deep snow. Late in the day, and numbed with cold, they sighted a Tibetan encampment and made for it, hoping to find some shelter from the freezing temperature. Riding up to the tents, they were happy to be invited in and given a hearty welcome.

Soon a kettle of water was boiling over a yak-manure fire and in a few minutes more the weary travelers were enjoying hot tea and barley meal. The curious Tibetans plied the white man with questions which he attempted to answer between bites of food. When the simple meal was over, his hosts seated themselves crosslegged on the ground around the fire.

As the flames burned low, casting weird shadows against the dark tent walls, they listened to the missionary's story of salvation through Jesus Christ the
Son of God. Later that night, Mr. Plymire lay awake meditating with satisfaction on the events of the day; and in the dim light of the glowing embers he wrote:

"In spite of the intense cold we were very happy because we had been able to give the message of life to many Tibetans."

All through the night a strong wind beat against the tent and when the missionary arose to look out in the morning his heart sank. A heavy snow had fallen and was still falling, with no sign of diminishing. Not daring to wait for the weather to clear, Mr. Plymire ordered his men to follow him out into the storm. Landmarks were soon blotted out as the driving snow blew into their faces. Fortunately, a few days previous, they had got their bearings and set a compass from a high mountain in the distance. It was only by following this course that certain disaster was avoided. Even so, the missionary was beginning to wonder if the end had come.

"We found a camp just before nightfall," he comments. "Traveling was extremely difficult today, and very dangerous as we often did not see the holes in the snow, and the small streams till we fell into them. About fifteen inches of snow are blanketing the ground."

The storm increased in its fury and by the end of the third day the snow was waist deep.

"During these days we heard some horrible stories of men who perished in this awful storm," continues Mr. Plymire. "One entire caravan was wiped out within sight of our tent. From our camp we could see the very spot but could do nothing to rescue them or their snowbound animals. Reports came to us that one from
this tent, or that tent, did not return.... This is the worst storm in fifty years."

As the blizzard continued even the hardy Tibetans became concerned. Their animals could find no grass. In desperation they engaged the services of a high-ranking priest to intercede with the gods to bring an end to the storm quickly. The ceremony was conducted in a tent near the missionary's. He could hear the priest and his aides trying to appease the gods both with prayers and offerings. But the storm continued.

"How is it that even though this great priest is reading your sacred scriptures in order to stop the snow, yet it continues, and at times with violence?" asked the missionary.

The reply was simple: "This priest has a very great name; and when the snow is all down it will stop."

For nine awful days the blizzard continued, forcing the Plymire party to remain where it was. The missionary wrote:

"Our time was not idled away. Difficult as it was to get about during the storm, I visited a number of tents and gave the people the message of eternal life through Jesus Christ."

On one visit the missionary noticed a deeply wrinkled old lady, sitting to one side and turning a small prayer wheel.

"How old are you, mother?" he asked, curious of her past and wondering what stories might lie hidden behind that old and weather-beaten face.

"I am a hundred and four years old," came the quavering answer.

"How long have you been turning this prayer wheel?"
The old lady lifted a tired hand to her forehead and looked with unfocused eyes at the white man, but continued to spin the wheel betimes:

"Ever since I was old enough to understand," she said.

"Have you ever heard of Jesus?"

The wheel stopped turning for a brief moment. "No," she queried, "who is He?"

The missionary regarded the prayer-wheel turner with deep pity. What a tragedy, that in our Christian era, this woman had lived for one hundred years without ever hearing of God's offer of salvation. It was even more tragic to reflect that this old woman was but one of thousands more just as ignorant.

November 14th came, and the weather had improved sufficiently for the small expedition to strike out once more across the high plateau. But no sooner had they moved out than it began to snow again. To make matters worse, No Ga cut a bad gash in his leg and there were no clean bandages in their packs. Mr. Plymire bound up the cut as best he could with strips of underwear. Soon the caravan was on its way again.

Two weary weeks followed. Men and animals struggled on through the deep snow, stopping when they met travelers, to give them a portion of the printed gospel. Would they never reach a settlement large enough to shelter them from the severe weather?

Finally the caravan descended from the 17,000-foot pass above Chong Lung Kar. It is but a small settlement of black tents and a few mud huts. On hand to welcome the missionary was the head man of the district, who, after an exchange of greetings, invited him into his tent to spend the night.

"I remained here one day," recounts Mr. Plymire.
"We had a few real friendly and profitable conversations. This man is rather an exceptional fellow, open-hearted and ready to help me, and to be helped. He seemed quite pleased when I presented him with a New Testament."

Next morning, as the caravan prepared to leave Chong Lung Kar, the chief and his men gathered to see the party off.

"We have a few gifts for you," he announced. "We are happy you came to us and we want you to return some day." The words were apparently sincere, for the gifts were substantial: thirty pounds of butter, some beef, a bag of dried milk. These were a sign of lasting friendship.

Yet he must bid the new friend farewell, and the missionary again led his party westward across the wind-swept highland. The bitterness of the journey is evident from the December 14th entry in his diary:

"The route was very mountainous. A very high wind added to the cold and there was no shelter from the storm. We had great difficulty in fording a river one day. Sheer ice was covered with snow so that we could not see it at all. At last we managed to force our horses off the ice and into the water, but got out on the other side with great difficulty.

"By now I was aching all over from the cold dip in the river. We reached a small camp of nomads at six in the evening where a tent was put up for us. But fuel was so scarce that our fire was pitifully small. These people were so poor they had nothing to sell us.

"We tried to cook a little tea but even this was not a success. We got between our covers and spent the rest of the night trembling and aching from the cold."
This is only one more day that no thermometer can record the cold we feel."

And still the messenger of the Cross pressed on. He rejoiced to be favorably received at Shen Ja Zong, where he had the opportunity of handing out gospel portions to worshipers who had come to a near-by temple.

And now it was Christmas. But there were no joyful hearth-side celebrations for the evangelistic party. On this day Mr. Plymire led his expedition up toward the summit of an extremely high pass. On all sides tremendous stone peaks lifted their inhospitable heads proudly into the sky; the wind whined across the rocky slopes. As the climb continued, Mr. Plymire had unusual difficulty in breathing. The yaks paused often than usual also in their struggle upward. At last, gasping for breath, his head throbbing with pain, the missionary stumbled up the last slope to stand upon the summit: 20,600 feet above the level of the sea.

Descending the rugged slopes on the other side and following the poorly marked trail out onto the plateau, the party missed the way. When they stumbled finally into a little, out-of-the-way place called Cheri Ma Lung, Mr. Plymire went to call on the head man to see if there were any animals available for hire. His request was greeted with a storm of abuse.

"You are off your route. I refuse to help you at all. I am not responsible for you," declared the angry man.

Helpless, the party waited for nine long days in the town. Unless the head man would provide fresh animals it was impossible to go on. Each day's delay was adding to the drain on the meager supply of barley meal. The missionary kept praying earnestly for help.
Then one morning the head man, without any apparent reason, suddenly changed his attitude toward the visitors. He came to see them, bringing a sheep as a gift.

“Tomorrow,” promised the head man, “fresh pack animals will be loaded and waiting for your use.”

Mercifully, the missionary could not know what misfortune lay ahead of him as he and his party left Cheri Ma Lung the next day. The days seemed to pass uneventfully enough as they continued across the bleak highland. They had grown accustomed to the snow- and dust-laden winds.

But now the caravan came to an ice-bound river. To make sure that it was safe for the pack animals to cross, Mr. Plymire rode out onto the ice. Snow had covered a thin spot. Without warning it gave way, plunging horse and rider into the frigid waters below.

In the ensuing confusion Mr. Plymire was unable to free himself from his saddle, and though the water was not deep he could not avoid thoroughly soaking his feet. With the temperature far below freezing it was of utmost importance that a fire be built and the wet feet warmed and dried before they froze. Alas! not even a small stick or dry root could be found with which to build a fire.

Forced to go on through the deep snow, he decided to walk rather than ride so as to keep the circulation moving in his feet. It was of no use. As his feet began to freeze they gradually lost all feeling. He struggled on for one more day and then had to give up.

When evening came some kind Tibetans took him into their tent, building a small fire to try to make the missionary as comfortable as possible. However, it was plain that, except for a miracle, Mr. Plymire’s feet
could not be saved, and he would soon perish from infection and loss of blood. He gritted his teeth in pain. Having guided and protected him all through the weary months past, would his faithful God fail him now?

It should be said that in the world outside Mr. Plymire had long been given up for dead. Nothing had been heard from him for eight months and all attempts to learn of his whereabouts had ended in failure.

Again the incredible happened. Blessedly involved in this true account were two elderly people in Detroit, Michigan. But for their faithfulness in prayer, Victor Plymire might never have reached civilization. It was more than ten years before the missionary even knew of the circumstances leading to his miraculous recovery. The unusual story is told in a short correspondence between Mr. Plymire and a Mrs. Dean, in Detroit. The letter from Mrs. Dean, dated May 28, 1937 reads:

"Dear Brother Plymire:

"Perhaps you are wondering why you are hearing from far-off Detroit. The reason is that I have prayed for you and for your work for years. One time while praying for you I had a very peculiar experience. I always declared that if the Lord ever permitted your address to fall into my hands I would surely write you about it.

"First let me tell you that I am an old lady with a very small work in a factory district. We have a great missionary interest for so small a place.

"Now about the experience which has bothered me for years. You will remember the time when you were reported killed. One evening I picked up
the paper and was astonished to read that you had started on that lonely trek and were reported killed. My heart sank. I cried out, 'Now who will enter Tibet?' and fell on my knees. I kept hanging onto God. The next day the paper stated definitely that the news had come that you were dead. How terrible I felt. Then the spirit of prayer came upon me and, as I knelt weeping, the Holy Spirit cried out, 'Oh, his poor feet, Lord, his poor feet.' You can well imagine my dismay. I was actually praying for a dead man's feet.

"That night I went to church and found out that one of the elders had had the same experience over you. That comforted me a little....

"Now I would like so much to know all about it. Your friend and sister in the Lord, Mrs. L. E. Dean"

In reply Mr. Plymire wrote:

"Dear Sister Dean:

"Your letter is most interesting. You are the third person to be directed of the Lord to pray for me.... How wonderful God is. Now as to my feet. Both of my feet were frozen along the outside. When I would pull on my shoes those cold mornings, I would grind my teeth, such pain I had. But I earnestly pled with God that that part of my feet would not drop off. He heard my plea; He heard your plea and answered. The flesh was dead, yet God did keep it on, and my feet are normal now...."

Once again the lifetime promise of God had stood the test.

For ten days, during which the missionary suffered intensely from the pain in his feet, the little party rode on through western Tibet. On the few occasions
where no snow could be found, they carried a chunk of ice with them so that it could be melted at the end of the day's journey to provide water for the little cooking that had to be done. Dotting the high plateau were many Tibetan tents. Not one of them did the missionary miss. He was determined to give the gospel to as many of these nomads as possible.

On February 15 Mr. Plymire spotted in the distance the welcome view of a city. It proved to be Gartok. In this lonely place he was most hospitably welcomed by the chief who showed no common interest in the gospel story. They had many long conversations together and when the expedition left, the chief sent them on their way with helpful gifts of butter, mutton and feed for their horses.

From Gartok the three men of the little evangelistic expedition began the last leg of their long and torturous journey. They struggled through even deeper snows toward the Himalaya mountains in the distant west. There were still more ice-bound streams to be crossed, more passes to be scaled. Intense cold continued. Yet each day saw the historic expedition nearing its end. It was well that it was so for their food supply was almost gone, their clothing worn beyond repair.

In spite of the hardships they had endured and the privations they had suffered, on February 26, 1928 Victor Plymire led the triumphant expedition into Ru Shuk, a small town west of the Tibetan border.

"Here our last gospels were given out," he wrote. "Thus we were able with the help and guidance of the Lord, to give the gospel to Tibetans from one end of the country through to the other—from the extreme northeast down into the very heart of the country and on through western Tibet. The headman of each
district through which we passed was given a New Testament. For all this I praise God. This was the object of this venture."

A letter to his mother reads:

"I am quite well, only very thin, and have not had a chance to pick up on this long cold journey. Even though the trip has been very hard, I am glad that I have taken it and worked my way across this part of Tibet. So far as I know I am the only American to do this, and I am the only missionary to accomplish this. All others have been turned back near their starting places."

Victor Plymire had walked and ridden for almost 2,000 miles through the most rugged country on earth. For nine months he had battled his way across snow-capped mountains and sun-baked desert. Tibet now lay behind. His mission was accomplished.

The mission to the Tibetans had indeed been accomplished but there were still many dangerous miles ahead before the weary men could reach civilization. Entering Ladak, the small mountainous country north of Kashmir, the expedition abandoned the use of pack animals. Hiring a few Tibetans to carry what remained of the baggage, they pushed on through the deep snows. They followed the Indus River along a narrow rocky trail which hung precariously to the cliffs lining the winding gorge. Far below them the angry river raged. One false move would mean a sheer drop into the torrent below.

Arriving in Leh, capital of Ladak, the party rested for a few days before setting out across the mountains for Srinagar some two hundred and forty miles distant. To the last it seemed, the missionary must be tested and retested. Added to the other dangers a new one—
avalanches—was now encountered. The warmth of spring began to loosen huge quantities of snow high on the mountains. Without warning this snow would come roaring down, sweeping everything before it.

One day while leading his men along the narrow, winding trail on the mountain’s edge, Mr. Plymire heard a faint rumbling. Another avalanche was on its way down. But where? The rumbling grew louder as the men stood still, wondering what to do. Suddenly the avalanche burst into view. It was rushing down the slope directly above them! Looking frantically for shelter the men spied a rock, made a dash for it, flung themselves under it. The huge mass of snow thundered down and with a deafening roar smashed against the huge rock, engulfing it in a swirling, suffocating cloud of fine snow. It rushed on down the mountain to pile up in the valley below while the men nervously crawled out from under the rock.

After they had walked eight more days through deep snow, the trail descended to lower altitudes. How suddenly the scenery changed and how beautiful the world had become! Flowers were in full bloom; for spring had come with its warmth and showers. It must be admitted that the rain had its bad aspects. It turned the dirt path into one continuous mud puddle!

On March 29, 1928, in the pouring rain, the bedraggled expedition arrived in Srinagar.

“I took off my shoes and the water simply ran out,” says Mr. Plymire. “My clothes were wet through.”

But at last he could consider that the long trek was ended. The ten months of arduous traveling were a thing of the past. There would be no more exhausting climbs, no more icy streams, no more freezing nights in the open—at least not for a while.
13. A New Beginning

It had been eight years since Victor Plymire had taken furlough. Even now he had no thought of returning to the homeland. He would not sail for the United States but for Shanghai. His one thought was to return to Tangar and his work in Tibet as quickly as his physical condition would permit.

On April 18, the missionary left Calcutta, India by boat. At Shanghai he decided to transship for Peking and a good rest. The good Lord who had so graciously preserved the life of His servant had special plans in mind for him in this capital city of China.

Four years previously a Miss Ruth Weidman had come to China with her sister Elizabeth. They had been occupied with language study and were now waiting for the Lord's direction as to their place of ministry.

Victor felt strongly attracted to Ruth and during the months in Peking spent much time with her, visiting
the special sights in the ancient city, and walking together with her in the lovely oriental parks. Both were deeply consecrated; both desired the Lord's best for their lives. So they found it helpful to discuss their plans and discovered that it was easy to think of a future together. Could they not work effectively as a team?

Their fellow missionaries had not failed to notice the growing attachment. It was therefore no surprise when the engagement was announced. And on August 8, 1928, at Tientsin, Victor Plymire and Ruth Weidman were married.

On September 3rd of that year, the newlyweds gathered up a few articles necessary for simple housekeeping and, together with Mrs. Plymire's sister Elizabeth, set out for the distant mission station on the Tibetan border. To Mr. Plymire the way was familiar, but to the young ladies all was indeed strange and different. They sailed up the Yangste to Hankow, then boarded a small freight train for Liang Pao, the end of the line. Here, after the baggage had been loaded on large, wooden-wheeled carts, they climbed on too, for the dusty, bouncing, four-hundred-and-fifty-mile jaunt to Lanchow in Northwest China. From here it was only a hundred and fifty miles to Tangar.

However, at that time the journey to Tangar could prove to be a hundred and fifty miles of terror; for the Chinese and Moslem populations were at each other's throats, threatening to begin full-scale hostilities at any moment. To prevent such a clash the authorities had restricted travel on the roads to those who were on official business only. Even these important people must have a valid traveling permit, almost impossible to obtain.
The missionaries, too, must have a permit to go on. And they wished to move soon, for there was serious illness at the inn where they were staying and it did not seem wise to remain. But they had no official status! When in difficulties such as these, gospel envoys know where to apply. They go to the Throne of Grace. So these missionaries applied to God in heaven, asking Him to make a way for them to proceed to their station.

A young Chinese officer, a former friend of the missionaries, called at the inn where they were staying. He had heard that they were in the city and wanted to have a short visit with them. During the conversation Mr. Plymire mentioned that they wished to leave but could not because they lacked the necessary travel permit. The young officer listened sympathetically, promising to do what he could. Imagine Mr. Plymire’s surprise when the next day another young officer called and presented the permit! More than that, the officer informed the missionaries that he would accompany them to the Kansu border to make sure there was no trouble.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Plymire had taken quite ill, and her husband was reluctant to travel with his wife in such a condition. Yet, if they did not go now the permit would expire and another would indeed be difficult to obtain. Accordingly, animals were hired to carry the baggage for the seven-day journey over the narrow, rocky road to Tangar.

Taking Elizabeth with them, the Plymires set out on the last leg of the journey. Mrs. Plymire was carried on a large litter as she was too ill to ride a horse. After a few hours her condition took a turn for the
worse. A high fever added to her misery and pain, driving her into a delirium.

Her husband became fearful. Were not these symptoms similar to those of the man who had died back at the inn in Lanchow? He was deep in thought as he walked alongside the litter on which lay his companion. Was it going to happen all over again, and so soon? He could but pray as the small party continued. Mrs. Plymire did not complain nor did she ask to turn back. For her, this was all in the line of duty. And shortly afterward her condition began steadily to improve.

Their escort had left them at the border. Now they had traveled for two days in the province of Tsinghai and come to the well-guarded check point, Nien Pei. Not having been informed of the missionaries' coming, the guard refused to let them pass; they must turn back. A crowd gathered to witness the outcome.

A young officer arrived. He stalked over to see what the commotion was about. As he studied the missionaries he could not remember having seen the ladies before, but the man looked strangely familiar. Then he remembered! Some years before—his injured hand and the blood poisoning that had set in, then the kindly white man who had operated on it, saving his life.

Hurriedly dismounting he enthusiastically greeted his old friend and was introduced to the ladies. Turning to the guards he said, "You have nothing to fear from this man. He is an old friend of mine. This lady is his wife, and this one is his wife's sister. Let them through."

So it was that on November third, exactly two months from the day they had left Shanghai, the missionaries
rode into Tangar. The happy Christians had heard of their coming and had come out a good distance from the city to meet them. How good it seemed to be in the very place where God wanted them to be!
Descending from Zoji Pass in Ladak, March 1928.

The missionary and his party crossing an avalanche near Sonemarg, Kashmir.
14. Reign of Terror

Of trouble-free days, it seemed, there could not be many. Before long the Plymires were to pass through one of the hardest tests of their lives. Nor would the passing years ever erase from their memories the awful events which they were forced to witness.

As the new year dawned, the political unrest which had threatened to explode into full-scale war seemed to have been brought under control. Therefore no one was prepared for what was to follow in peaceful Tangar.

The trouble began when a small band of outlaws raided an isolated jail, freeing the prisoners. Through this easy success the ringleaders became confident of themselves and carried out a second such raid. Quickly added to the ranks of these outlaws were many who wished to make a living other than by working, and also a large number of disgruntled soldiers.
This lawless band moved on, killing and looting, its ranks ever increasing until it became an army of almost twenty thousand! These men were armed with a motley assortment of weapons, including guns and spears. With no one to oppose them, they advanced steadily northwest, leaving behind a trail of devastation and bloodshed.

Refugees fleeing before them soon began to arrive in Tangar, bringing reports of the horrible atrocities committed. Fear gripped the hearts of the townspeople as they set about to fortify the city and planned how they might defend it against the oncoming horde of blood-thirsty plunderers.

Tension mounted. The doomed city awaited the dreaded moment of attack. The missionaries also waited, in prayer and readiness. They had decided to make the best of it with the people. The Christians especially would need encouragement when the fateful hour struck. It would not look good to run away. As the Plymires prayed they received assurance that God would protect them. The scriptural phrase, "Kept by the power of God," had been so strongly impressed upon Mrs. Plymire that both of them felt it was a promise from heaven. If that were so, there was nothing to fear.

It was February 14th. Word came that the bandit army was only a short distance south of the city. At once the huge city gates were closed. The missionaries prepared for the impending battle by moving to a corner room downstairs where the thick mud walls would afford good protection from bullets.

By sunrise the following morning a deathly silence had crept over the city. Guards on the high wall strained to see some sign of the approaching bandit
army. As they watched, a cloud of smoke arose from a burning village just over the nearby hill. A few shots echoed down the valley.

All at once the horde appeared, rounding a spur in the valley. Some were charging along on horses. Others were running afoot. With swords and spears gleaming in the morning sun, the mob streamed across a wooden bridge a short distance away. Then, climbing the hill at the base of the city wall, they surrounded the town so that none might escape. Loudly demanding to be let in, they promised to hurt no one.

But the townspeople refused. Enraged, the bandits tried to scale the high wall. The determined population managed to prevent this. The rebels then made for the west gate. While a few men with rifles and pistols kept those on the wall pinned down, others placed straw against the massive wooden doors of the gate and, setting fire to them, watched gleefully as they began to burn. In a few moments the doors collapsed with a tremendous thud. Inside the missionaries waited.

Clambering over the burning embers, the maddened horde now pours into the city, killing and butchering right and left. Many of the people make a rush for the only place of safety they can think of: the mission station. They come in over the roof and through the entrance while Mr. Plymire shoves them into various rooms and locks the doors. Noticing some elderly people trying to get down from the roof, he climbs up a ladder to help them, only to be struck in the chest by a heavy rock hurled at him by a bandit on the city wall.

Meanwhile the shouts of the bandits mingled with the screams of the wounded and dying as these heartless men engaged in unspeakable atrocities. As Mr.
Plymire reported later: "Children were held up by the feet and cut in half or pulled apart. Some were carried about on spears. Not far from us they cut both feet off an old man."

By now the bandits were pounding on the mission doors demanding to be let in. Together, Mr. and Mrs. Plymire went to unbar the gates. What could they expect from these cruel men who knew nothing of mercy? Opening the doors the missionaries were face to face with two evil-looking bandits, each with a bloody sword gripped securely in his hand.

The missionaries waited for them to speak first. "Our leader sent us," announced one of the ruffians. "We are to raise his flag over your property so that no one will harm you or your property. You have nothing to fear."

What explanation could there be for this, except that once more God had overruled the intentions of men? For when the two ruffians left the mission they immediately showed what they were capable of.

"They spied a man on the barn roof and ordered him down," says Mr. Plymire. "The man came down begging for mercy. I tried to save him from their swords but they swung over my head and struck him in the mouth. Then they shot him." It was too horrible to behold.

These two bandits were no sooner out of sight than another appeared, alone. He entered the barn and emerged with the missionary's horses. He was carrying a bloody sword and seemed in a bad humor. Mr. Plymire decided to let him alone. Leading his loot out into the street, the would-be horse thief was accosted by a fellow bandit:

"Where did you get these fine horses?" he asked.
"I took them from the mission," the thief replied.
"Don't you know we have been ordered to take nothing from there?" demanded the other. "You must take the horses back immediately before our leader finds out what you have done."

Meekly obeying, the man returned with the horses and tied them up. He apologized sheepishly to Mr. Plymire.

But now another bandit came in. As he passed one of the rooms where people were hiding, someone inside inadvertently made a sound, attracting his attention. Peeking through a crack in the door he saw those inside and demanded to be let in. It was obvious that the man was intent on killing: his bloody sword emphasized his intentions. The missionary was in a difficult position but he could not bear the thought of seeing helpless people slaughtered and on mission property. Planting himself in front of the door, Mr. Plymire said quietly,

"To get inside you must kill me first!"

This show of courage took the man by surprise and for a moment he did not know what to answer. But two more felons had come up, also demanding to be let inside.

"I will permit you if you promise not to hurt those inside," said the missionary; but he insisted that the first bandit could not go in. The other two promised: "We will only search the people for valuables," and to prove their honesty they left their swords outside. In a few moments they emerged with their loot, picked up their swords and left.

Returning to the mission entrance, the missionary was nearly knocked down by a Tibetan who fled from two bandits in hot pursuit. The Tibetan jumped be-
hind Mr. Plymire to escape their bloody swords. The latter offered the bandits some money if they would spare the man's life. To his surprise they accepted the offer and left.

Around the neck of the Tibetan hung a large silver amulet which had been blessed by a priest and was supposed to protect the wearer from harm. Taking it from his neck, the man insisted that Mr. Plymire should have it.

"Take it, take it," he cried. "It is of no use to me. You are the one who saved my life."

By now the injured bandits were coming to the missionary for treatment. Though he detested their actions, he felt it best to comply. After all, several fellow bandits were standing round with their blood-stained swords, watching what he would do!

For hours the horrible slaughter continued without let-up, while the cries of the wounded mingled with those of the dying. Now a cloud of smoke was rising from the burning west suburbs. How long would this carnage go on?

While Mr. Plymire was taking care of one of the wounded bandits, the sound of rifle fire echoed out of the east. The man he was attending sat up with a start.

"That shooting is not from our men!" he exclaimed. "It must have come from the government troops! They have caught up with us!" Without waiting to be bandaged the man jumped up, grabbed his weapon and rushed off.

In a matter of minutes every bandit had left the city to take up positions in the mountains east of Tangar. The battle continued through the night and on into the next morning when the bandits were finally driven across the mountains to the north.
A severely wounded man who was brought into the mission by his friends for medical attention.

A sword wound inflicted by a bandit during the massacre. This man survived and lived for many years.
One of the many seriously wounded by bandits.

The ruins of west Tangar where the bandit horde did its worst.
Soon the wounded were pouring into the mission. One man had nine sword cuts in his head. Another had a huge slash over the forehead, down over the nose and across the eyes. Still another had a spear thrust through his shoulder.

While the missionaries began the gruesome task of caring for these pitiful sufferers, several men entered carrying another injured man on a door panel. When they laid the man down the Plymires instantly recognized him as Mr. Yang, a young schoolteacher who had recently been saved. With him were his unconverted relatives. Mr. Plymire prepared to do what he could for him; but the young man protested:

"I do not have long to live, pastor," he exclaimed. "I want to die here because this is where I found Christ. So I asked my friends to bring me."

Then in a feeble voice he began to sing, "Take the Name of Jesus With You." His faith grew stronger than ever as death drew near.

Addressing his sorrowing family, the young teacher exhorted them to put their trust in Christ so that they might meet him in heaven.

"Then," records Mr. Plymire, "in the presence of his relatives and his aged father, he committed his spirit to the Lord and passed on to glory—away from bandits, free from care."

The number of wounded was so great, and the emergency supplies were so limited, that it was all the missionaries could do to keep the wounds clean and free from infection. They cut up their bed sheets for bandages. They worked from morning till night trying to bring relief to the suffering. Some were so severely wounded that the best of care could not have saved them.
All through that summer the work of mercy went on. The missionaries were taxed to the limit of their endurance. “Many times I bathed the wounds with my own tears as I worked, trying to put on the bandages,” reports Mr. Plymire.

Three thousand dead were counted: almost a third of the town’s population. Eight hundred were wounded, some maimed for life. Fathers were killed, leaving their families without a provider. In some cases both parents were gone, leaving the hapless children to roam the ruins of what once was home.

Surely the ghastly spectacle would never fade from memory. Yet neither could the missionaries ever forget the protecting power of God. Mr. Plymire testifies: “During these days bullets were flying in all directions over our place, yet not one of them hit the house or fell in the yard. It was very wonderful how the Lord protected us. God is faithful. He is a refuge, a stronghold for His people.”
15. From Darkness to Light

Among the Tibetan converts was No Ga, the young man who had earlier accompanied Mr. Plymire on his trans-Tibet evangelistic expedition.

Visiting the Plymires one evening in their living room, No Ga made his confession of faith in Christ. The unusual incidents which transpired on the long trek, he said, had convinced him of the existence of one true God. Reliving the entire trip, he recounted time after time when he sensed that God had intervened and averted disaster. To him this was a clear indication that the missionary's God was the true God. After prayer, on that memorable evening, No Ga testified that he knew Christ had come into his life. And from that moment—until his martyrdom twelve years later
—he was a living testimony to the transforming power of Christ.

No Ga’s family and relatives were infuriated when they learned of his conversion. But their threats failed to move him. Even his elder brother Ka Zong, who had also traveled with the missionary, tried to intimidate him. There were threats of physical violence but they were all of no avail.

Eventually, No Ga’s consistent life made an impression on Ka Zong. Three years later, he too was thoroughly converted.

Then there was Mrs. Yen, a Chinese widow who evidenced a genuine and remarkable change in her life. She lived in extreme poverty in a small hut on the outskirts of town, eking out an existence by begging from house to house. What little money she received was spent on opium. A large goiter completed her miseries.

The opium habit was not easily broken. She tried at first to hide the habit from the other believers. But one night she became greatly convinced about it and took steps to break its hold upon her. The next morning she brought to the Plymires her supply of opium, together with the crude oxhorn pipe in which she smoked it.

“This habit is a sin,” she declared. “Last night God showed me how wicked it was. I want you to pray with me. Ask God to help me break the habit; for I know He is displeased.”

The missionaries knelt with her at once, believing that God would break the fetters of this horrible narcotic. The results were immediate and miraculous. From that time on the widow never again touched the weed. Not only that, her goiter disappeared!
Mrs. Yen's faithfulness to God was an inspiration to all. Nothing could keep this determined old lady from attending the services of the church. Let it be bitter cold. Let the rain come down in torrents. She was never absent. One Wednesday she arrived for the service thoroughly soaked and with her cloth shoes caked with mud.

Noticing her bedraggled condition, Mrs. Plymire demurred. "Mrs. Yen, you have come out on a day like this?"

"What would the Lord say if I hadn't?" was her simple reply.

A Tibetan priest was another outstanding convert. His conversion too, was no ordinary one. For, whatever the depths of Satan, a Tibetan priest is sure to know them. That his spiritual darkness could be dispelled is an indisputable evidence of the transforming power of the Lord Jesus.

Conviction rested so strongly on this Tibetan priest that, before he made his public confession, he determined to sever himself from his dark practices. He came to Mr. Plymire one day, bringing with him the various instruments which are used in devil worship. Among them was a trumpet made from a human thigh-bone. This was employed when he wished to call demons to the sacrifices.

"I am going to be a Christian," he explained, as he gave all the things to the missionary, "and will no longer want these. I want you to take them."

Christmas of 1929 was indeed a joyous occasion for the missionaries. On that day four new converts were baptized. These candidates had found Christ real in their hearts, and the fact that the weather was very
cold and the river nearly frozen over could not chill their enthusiasm!

Early in March, 1930 twenty-four more converts were baptized.

Among these was a Mohammedan who, in spite of extreme persecution, had taken his stand for Christ. The evidence is strong—though the fact was never proven—that this devout man eventually paid the supreme price for his faith in Jesus Christ. One day, three years later, he suddenly disappeared, never to be seen again.

Years of faithful labor had at last begun to result in changed lives, both among the Tibetans and the Chinese.
16. Forced Furlough

How often it happens that the missionary spends himself so unreservedly in the service of others that he has no time for his own proper rest and recuperation! Almost ten years of relentless effort on the part of Victor Plymire had taken their toll. Thus it befell that during the very times of blessing described in the last chapter he was stricken with a sudden heart attack. His condition became critical and it appeared that he would die.

Day and night Mrs. Plymire and the Christians prayed for his recovery. There was a slight improvement but it was obvious that only a complete rest could restore him. Mrs. Plymire began making preparations for the long journey back to the United States.

On March 28th Mr. Plymire climbed into a large litter, followed—on horseback—by Mrs. Plymire and her sister Elizabeth; and rode out of Tangar toward
The converted Tibetan priest who brought his instruments of heathen worship including a human thighbone trumpet to the Plymires saying that he no longer needed them.

The raft on which the Plymires and Elizabeth Weldman journeyed down the Yellow River for twenty-four days.
the land of his birth. For a man in his weakened condition the primitive journey through China would indeed be difficult.

Eight days later the missionaries arrived in Lanchow. Here they boarded a crude raft measuring twelve by thirty feet. It consisted of 120 inflated sheepskins fastened to a timber framework. On it were two small bamboo-thatch cabins which served as shelter. The cooking was to be done on a small mud hearth.

Shoving off from shore the party began the thousand-mile trip down the muddy Yellow River! For the first fifty miles the river flowed through deep gorges. It was this spot which proved the most dangerous. Here the great stream is churned into a series of tumbling rapids and terrifying whirlpools. Concerning the shooting of these rapids, Mr. Plymire wrote:

"We had to ride the very tops of the waves to keep from being dashed to pieces against the rocks. During this day we had six strong men to guide the craft, men who were acquainted with every rapid, every whirlpool, and every rock which lay hidden just beneath the rushing current.

"I wish you could have seen the faces of our men as we passed through these rapids. They clung to the heavy baggage we had fastened to the raft as if it were their last hold on life." It seemed that the fragile craft would surely be torn apart but it stood the strain.

The missionaries were now far from their station yet they were constrained to witness to those whom they met along the way. Each night that the raft tied up near a village the missionaries disembarked and walked over for a visit. Of such a visit Mr. Plymire wrote:

"After a short talk with them we returned to the
raft. But several followed us, wanting to know more and asking for the books which we very gladly gave them, with a word of encouragement."

At the end of twenty-four long days the craft finally tied up at Pao Tow. Now they could travel by train: first to Peiping (Peking) and then to Shanghai, where they purchased steamship tickets for the voyage to the States. While waiting for the sailing, Mr. Plymire visited a doctor in order to determine his true condition. The verdict was a heavy blow for one whose heart and soul were still ready to be poured out in behalf of a people he loved more than life itself. The examining physician informed him that his heart had been injured beyond recovery and that he would have to give up his missionary career!

Yet, as the missionary boarded the ship for America, he felt an assurance that somehow God would return him to the land of his calling.

To a man who had been as active as Mr. Plymire, the waiting for recovery seemed interminable. As soon as he was able to move about, he began itinerating from church to church, doing his best to place the needs of Tibet before congregations large and small. When, in answer to much earnest prayer, his strength had returned sufficiently, plans were made for a return to the field.

But there were other obstacles than health. The depression was hindering the missionary efforts of the churches. Mission funds were so low that there was not enough to meet existing needs. It seemed impossible for the Plymires to raise their support. Yet there was that inner confidence that they were in the will of God!

Slowly but surely the finance was provided. People
who felt their responsibility to those in darkness responded to the best of their ability. Five dollars came from a Bible class teacher. Ten dollars came from the teacher's next door neighbor. Five more dollars were given by a friend across the street and six dollars by a Sunday School class. These small donations grew until there was sufficient to cover all expenses both of outfit and of transportation.

When the long-looked-for day of departure for Tibet arrived, on October 15, 1932, the missionary party had grown in numbers. With the Plymires was their small son David, born in San Francisco, in June the year before. Mrs. Plymire's sister Elizabeth was also ready to leave once more. And there was a new recruit, Mr. George Wood, who also had consecrated himself for service on the Tibetan border. George and Elizabeth were looking forward to marriage, having planned their wedding to take place at Shanghai.

Mr. Plymire had brought some transportation with him this time in the form of a new truck which, it was felt, would be of genuine service in the interior. Nevertheless, for the first part of the journey in China, the time-proven methods of travel were once more to be endured. Again there was the long journey by boat from Shanghai to Hankow, followed by a train trip to Tung Kuan. And from this point all the baggage would be carried in the ancient wooden-wheeled carts for five hundred miles to the mission station.

The missionaries themselves drove the new truck from Tung Kuañ to Sian, intending to continue right to Tangar. What a pleasant change this would be! But no, traveling conditions from Sian into the interior were considered too hazardous. Much banditry made it unsafe to travel the roads. Again a difficult decision
had to be made: Mr. Plymire would drive the truck through to Lanchow. The others would fly, via the small plane which operated between the two cities.

Thus it was that two days after the others had safely arrived in Lanchow, Mr. Plymire left Sian with the truck, having with him a young Chinese helper. Several people had asked him when he was leaving and whether he was carrying any money, so he felt it best to make a secret departure. Along the way there was plenty of evidence that bandits were at work.

"We saw parts of the bodies of murdered men still lying by the roadside," recounts Mr. Plymire, "as the dogs had not yet devoured them."

That afternoon the missionary and his companion pulled into Chi Ning Chow, a town at the foot of Lu Pan mountain, intending to begin the long climb over it early the next morning. During the night, however, a heavy snow made travel impossible. Perhaps he could leave later in the day. When he was about to start, it began to snow again and continued without let-up. High up on the mountain, snow-drifts began to block the narrow dirt road.

During the second night in his hut, the missionary prayed further for direction. Should he venture out into the snow the following morning or not?

"I asked God for guidance, so that I would not make any mistake, or in any way fail to have His mind. It was but a short time," says the account, "when He answered as if by a voice from heaven, 'Go, and I will be with thee.' I knew God had spoken to me and that it was not my own mind or natural thoughts."

The long ascent began immediately. Climbing up steep grades through unbroken snow, the truck pushed its way toward the pass. Writes Mr. Plymire:
“During this entire day the strain was terrible. I knew God had spoken to me. But there was no way of knowing whether or not I might run into a band of robbers around the next turn!”

His heart almost stood still as he drove past the exact spot where William Simpson, outstanding young missionary to Tibet, had been previously murdered by bandits. But no men with evil intent appeared on this day.

Descending the mountain, the missionary stopped at a small village after dark. It was there that he learned what he had escaped while delayed by the snow. A band of robbers had been working the road for two days. As many as twenty travelers had been relieved of their belongings and set afoot naked in the snow! Then, assuming that no one would be coming along until the snow had melted, the robbers had retired to their hideout. So they missed Mr. Plymire when he came through.

At Lanchow the other members of the party rejoiced in his safe arrival; then informed him of a report that the large bridge spanning the Yellow River was under repair. In fact all the flooring was being taken up. Hoping that this was not true Mr. Plymire went to look for himself, and discovered to his dismay that the flooring had already been removed. Now there was no way to cross the river.

Hearing that it would be some time before the flooring would be replaced, the anxious missionary went in search of the contractor. Perhaps the contractor would relay it temporarily. Unable to find him, Mr. Plymire returned to the bridge. How to cross? He was about to walk away when he noticed a rather unimportant-looking man apparently loafing
there. Determined to leave no stone unturned, he approached the man.

"Do you know of any way I can have the planks relaid?" he asked; and added, "I will give you five dollars if you can help me."

"How soon can you be ready to cross?" asked the stranger.

"As soon as you wish," promised Mr. Plymire.

"Very well then, come with your truck this afternoon."

Driving up at the time appointed, the missionary found every piece of flooring relaid. No sooner had he driven across than workmen again appeared, took up the planks and carried them off!

Next morning the Plymires and the Woods joined forces and walked across the bridge on a narrow board walk. They boarded the truck and began the last leg of the almost endless journey.

But now with each passing hour some familiar landmark comes into view. They are entering the mountains east of Tangar, winding through the gorge. Now the city wall can be seen, and at last, the gates. And who are those people gathered there? How happy the returning missionaries are to find that friends have come to greet them as they ride triumphantly through!

The Plymires were delighted to learn that during their absence nearly a hundred new converts had been added to the church. Under the two Chinese evangelists much progress had been made. In a farming community north of Tangar a number had turned to God. The chapel was crowded every Sunday—so much so that two worship services were necessary to accommodate those who came.

But while the missionaries were still joyously listen-
ing to the reports of progress, word came that on the lonely stretch of road between Sian and Lanchow their baggage had been robbed. At first they were informed that the loss did not exceed twenty dollars.

They waited anxiously for the carts to arrive, fearing the worst. When Mr. Plymire saw what the bandits had done, he broke down and wept publicly. There was not a single box that had not been broken into. Most had been emptied of their contents. In short, their outfit was a total loss; for all that remained was barely enough to fill one small box.

Refusing to become bitter over the experience, Mr. Plymire wrote: "God gives to us great grace, and we are trying to take joyfully the spoiling of our goods. We could use them to greater advantage than these wicked men. But we do praise God that none of us have suffered injury."

It was indeed a keen disappointment. Yet the missionaries must try to forget and to refrain from self-pity. After all, there was much work to be done. Were not the opportunities greater than ever before?
17. Come and Tell Us

As spring of 1933 arrived, Mr. Plymire busied himself with plans for the coming summer’s evangelistic expeditions. Seven years before, Ga Lo had invited him to pay the Kantsa tribe a visit and the missionary had not forgotten. But was Ga Lo still alive? If alive, did his invitation still stand? Would it be safe to assume that the strong bond of friendship still existed? This was a good time to find out.

Considering the risks and dangers involved on this trip, Mr. Plymire decided that the ladies should remain at the station. In company with Mr. Wood and two or three local men he would attempt to contact the chief of the Kantsa tribe. Accordingly a few yaks were bought to carry the tents, the cooking utensils, and the indispensable barley meal and butter.

After riding two days through familiar and friendly territory, the party descended a pass into a compara-
tively dangerous region. This was west of the pass, where robber bands plundered and murdered at will. Rumors had it that a band from the dreaded Go Lok tribe was terrorizing travelers.

As the expedition made camp at the foot of the mountain range, weird shadows fell across the high plateau. Darkness had crept in by the time a fire had been built and the missionaries and their men were sitting about it sipping tea. Finally, by the dim light of the dying embers, all prepared to retire.

But Mr. Plymire could not sleep. The very stillness of the night seemed to warn of danger lurking in the darkness outside the tent. A sense of impending trouble swept over him. They must move on.

But this seemed foolish. Whoever heard of breaking camp at night? What would the other men think? He lay there, reasoning, but could not get away from the definite feeling that it was unsafe to remain. In a moment he had awakened the others and ordered that the tents be struck and the camp moved up ahead a short distance. The darkness seemed even deeper as the men moved the tents and baggage to the new location. Soon they had retired for the second time.

Just afterward two Tibetans whom the missionaries had passed earlier in the day, arrived at the spot where the first camp had been. Discovering the embers of the campfire, they decided to save themselves the trouble of making their own. So, adding a little fuel to the smouldering ashes, the men prepared their frugal meal and, after eating, lay down in their small tent for the night.

Suddenly the night stillness was shattered by wild shouts, mingled with cries of desperation. In a few moments all was quiet again.
Daylight revealed what had transpired. A band of robbers had raided the tent, killed the two Tibetans, and carried off their few belongings. Viewing the mangled bodies of the unfortunate men, the missionaries shuddered to think what would have become of them had they not changed their camping site.

There was a strangely troubled look on chief Ga Lo's face several days later as he welcomed the missionaries into his camp.

"I had been told you were killed," announced the chief, surprised but overjoyed at seeing Mr. Plymire, his old friend, again.

The chief lost no time in preparing a Tibetan feast for his two white friends. While yak butter dissolved in hot tea, old friends renewed the bond of friendship—a unique friendship between a missionary and a Tibetan chief.

"May we give our books to your people?" Mr. Plymire had not forgotten his main purpose: he must bring the gospel to these wild nomads.

"You may indeed," responded Ga Lo, "and I will send my personal representative with you. Thus the people will know that you are my friends and will listen to your words."

Thrilled with the realization that God had chosen them to be the first to carry the message of salvation to the Kantsa tribe, the two missionaries spent several days among these Tibetans. As they rode back to Tangar it seemed they could still hear the chief's last words ringing in their ears:

"Peace be with you, and come again this summer."

By the grace of God, over half of Tibet had now been made safe for Victor Plymire to travel through. Sensing his grave responsibility, the missionary began to
collect equipment sufficient for a large and extended expedition into the interior. This time Mrs. Plymire would travel with him and Woods would remain behind in charge of the mission station.

Several yaks were bought and turned out upon the mountains to graze. As warmer summer days began to come, tents were packed and food supplies were stuffed into leather bags. Large quantities of gospels, tracts, and a supply of New Testaments were carefully placed in leather-bound boxes. When the caravan was ready, the yaks were brought in from the mountains and loaded for the long trek. The Plymires climbed into their saddles and headed their horses toward the mountain trail. With a whistle and a shout from one of the yak drivers, the 1934 evangelistic expedition was under way.

Having left Tangar behind and crossed the mountains to the west, the caravan descended to the Ko Ko Nor plain. There were yet two days of travel over the grassy plateau before the ascent to a high pass. As they reached the summit, Mr. Plymire spotted the black tents of the Kantsa people dotting the landscape. Moving rapidly down the slope the visitors soon covered the remaining distance to the encampment.

Ga Lo, the great chief, knew the missionaries were coming and gave them a hearty welcome.

"As we approached the chief's tent," writes Mr. Plymire, "he came out on to the top of a ridge and called us to come right on into his tent. This we did and were soon inside the large tent drinking buttered tea."

While the missionaries rested, the great Tibetan went outside to direct the men in setting up camp on a spot next to his. He selected an area that would be sheltered from the high winds.
Before long a crowd of curious Tibetans had gathered for a glimpse of the strange-looking white people. They were intrigued with their clothing—the boots especially. How, they wanted to know, could so many stitches be made in leather? And zippers—what marvelous things were zippers!

The next morning the chief called to present a gift of mutton and requested that Mr. Plymire accompany him on a game hunt.

“Always trying to become all things to all men that we may win some for the Lord,” quotes the missionary, “I mounted a horse the Tibetan had waiting, and with five others rode off in search of antelope.” The missionary’s prestige rose a notch in the eyes of the nomads when he bagged his antelope on the first shot.

The following day the missionaries visited nearby tents to distribute gospel literature. In the afternoon Mr. Plymire preached to an assembled crowd of curious but interested tribesmen. And the third day, accompanied by the chief’s representative, the missionary rode off to visit more distant tents.

Returning, the missionary was informed that the chief of the Cham Ri tribe had come. A member of the Kantsa tribe had been robbed by a Cham Ri man and the case had to be settled with Ga Lo.

“The white man is my good friend,” declared Ga Lo, introducing the Cham Ri chief, “and you should have him come to your tribe.” And thus it came about that, within a short time, the missionaries had received the coveted invitation.

Back in Tangar once more the Plymires and the Woods made preparations for a trip to the great monastery of Kum Bum. The Woods had hopes of establishing a station there for Tibetan work. The
trip was made in February of 1935. Afterward, Mr. Plymire wrote to his friends in America, telling them of the slow but sure advances of the gospel:

"We have just attended the fair at Kum Bum. Here we met many people from different parts of Tibet. On one hillside we noticed many tents. We went over to visit these men and discovered that they were devil worshipers. . . . We were glad to give them a word concerning the Saviour.

"I was attracted by one of these priests who was drinking his morning tea from a human skull. He seemed to enjoy it just as much as we do when drinking out of our fine china cups!

"When I first visited this monastery in 1909, a mob of angry priests got after me and put me out. But by going constantly and being kind to these men, I finally won them over. On this last trip I gave Testaments to the priests on the very spot from which I was driven out.

"The head of the monastery is our good friend now and has granted me certain favors. We praise God for these favors and for the change that has taken place."

The next spring the Plymires were ready to answer the Cham Ri chief's invitation of the year before. The journey was made unpleasant by an incessant downpour of rain. Everything was so wet that it was nearly impossible to find fuel to cook with. But in spite of the adverse weather the expedition pressed on toward the distant camp.

The Cham Ri chief gave the missionaries a warm Tibetan welcome, inviting them into his tent for a meal of boiled mutton and hot tea, followed by chunks of hard white cheese.

A religious festival was in session and nearly the
entire tribe had gathered for the occasion. This was indeed fortunate.

In a large tent which had been pitched out on the grassy plateau under the encircling snow-capped peaks, over three thousand Tibetans sat in reverent silence. They were listening to the head priest as he read their sacred writings.

At one point in the ritual, the red-robed leader descended from the pedestal on which he had been sitting, to pass out dried, sacred flowers. The people were to place them on their foreheads so that they might better understand their scriptures.

Again he distributed bits of red cloth to the congregation. These they fastened around their arms. Thus they were assured of escaping torment after death.

At another meeting the people were seated in rows. As they reached out their hands, the priest walked down each row pouring holy water into cupped palms. They drank the water and were then told they would not need to pass through purgatory.

It was during the intermissions that the missionaries had their opportunity. Many of the people—even some of the priests—would come to visit. One arrogant priest told Mr. Plymire that he had no need of salvation as he himself was a god!

“Do gods sin?” asked the missionary.

“Of course not,” answered the priest.

“Do you sin?”

“Yes,” admitted the priest rather reluctantly.

“Then how can you call yourself a god?” countered Mr. Plymire.

The man was silent, for he knew that none among men were so wicked, so immoral, as his own kind.

“On the last day of the ceremonies,” declares the
The evangelistic expedition visiting with Mongolians of the Koko Nor district.

Ga Lo—Great Tibetan chief and friend of missionaries poses with Mr. Plymire.
Ca Lo's brother's Tibetan bride on the wedding day.

The Gospel expedition's camp on a high plateau in Arig territory. In the distance rise the great Nan Mountains clad in eternal snow, which the expedition crossed in order to reach the Arig tribe.
The evangelistic caravan pausing during the long climb to the 17,000 ft. pass over the Nan Mountains.
COME AND TELL US

Tibetans of the Arig tribe assembled beneath a huge tent listening to their priest as he delivers religious instructions.

The Great Priest of the Arig tribe who told his people, "There is one coming whose name is Love."
missionary, "the great priest, in a most startling manner, told the people there was One coming whose name is Love. These Tibetans are now waiting for this to transpire. How our hearts long for them to understand that this 'One' is Jesus."

It was with happy hearts that the missionaries rode back to Tangar. They had visited each tent of the tribe while at the festival, had spoken to the people concerning salvation, and had given each one a gospel. They would not forget the chief's parting words:

"I want you to come back and tell us more about your religion."

Hardly had they returned when they received an urgent invitation from Ga Lo to come again. His brother was getting married and nearly the whole tribe would gather for the occasion. "Come prepared to tell them more about the new religion," he suggested.

Though tired from the previous trip, the missionaries had no thought but to go. Taking little David with them they hurried along over the trail to chief Ga Lo's encampment. After the welcoming meal, the great man asked that on the morrow Mr. Plymire accompany him and the reception party as they rode out to meet the bridal procession coming from the Arig tribe.

The chief and his several hundred mounted men were a colorful lot as they started off the next morning, the missionary with them. The chief was warmly clothed in a purple, fur-trimmed robe, and carried a shiny sword in a silver-plated scabbard. His men were dressed in their long sheepskin garments, swords held in place by their bright red girdles.

Mr. Plymire tells how they met the arriving party. A shout arose as the bridal procession was seen in the
distance. Racing ahead, the reception party surrounded the bride and attendants. More horsemen then galloped on the scene and, after encircling the bridal procession, escorted it to the camp.

Now all of the men dismount to form a long line. The ladies, decked in silks and satins and silver ornaments, form another line. And the bride rides slowly between the two lines, coming to a halt on a rug spread there on the green grass.

The bride is dressed in a black and gold robe of satin. It is trimmed in otter. Large necklaces of jewels hang about her neck. As the gaping onlookers strain to catch fleeting glimpses of her, she dismounts and is led into the chief’s tent for the wedding ceremony.

Standing before an altar flanked by two red-robed priests, the Tibetan bride makes her wedding vows. She has become the wife of a groom who is nowhere in sight, for he will remain hidden until the next day.

“Evidently he took a fright,” comments Mr. Plymire.

“The ceremony is over now,” declared the chief, addressing the missionaries. “Do all the preaching you can today while the people are sober. I have ordered them not to drink, so they can listen to what you say. Tomorrow everyone will be drunk.”

“We had wonderful opportunities to reach nearly every family of the tribe,” writes Mr. Plymire. “We remained for several days...and preached to many who had never before heard the gospel message. What opportunities! What responsibilities!”

As the missionaries prepared to return to Tangar, the chief strolled over for a short visit. What he was about to say would indeed bring joy to the missionaries’ hearts.

“Mr. Plymire,” he said, “I believe your doctrine is
the best I have heard. I would like for my people to hear more. Unless you are with us more, this will not be possible. Will you come and live with us? If you will, we are prepared to build a house for you, and will do our best to take care of your needs.”

This was what the missionary had been waiting for! What could be better than to live among his dear Tibetans and to pour out his life for them! Yes, he would be most happy to make his home on the high plateau. Promising to return as soon as they could find new missionaries to take over the mission station at Tangar, the Plymires bade their great friend good-bye.

When the missionaries returned to Tangar they heard disquieting reports concerning the Chinese Nationalists and the Communists, who were locked in a struggle to gain control of Kiangsi province. These military operations could well upset their cherished plans. (Eventually the Communists decided to retreat and take up positions in Shensi province, which borders outer Mongolia. Striking out for Northwest China, the Communist army began one of the greatest military marches in history.)

Aware of the possibility that they might have to leave their work indefinitely, the Plymires determined to make further efforts to carry the gospel to Tibetans.

Leaving a man at the mission (who was to find and warn them should it become necessary to flee), they set out on a venture into territory where no missionary had ever been.

As they came to a tremendous, snow-covered range, Mr. Plymire tried to persuade his guide to lead the caravan through a narrow gap some distance south of the regular pass. The man refused at first, entreating
that it would be impossible to cross anywhere except at the pass. But when the missionary insisted, he finally agreed to guide the expedition over the unknown trail.

Men and animals struggled up the rugged snow-covered slope, gasping for breath in the rarified atmosphere. Near the summit they discovered a faint outline of a trail. Crossing by this unfamiliar pass, they descended between towering cliffs. The caravan gradually dropped below the snowline and moved down into a grassy valley. Here, almost hidden from view, was a Tibetan camp.

"At first the people were afraid of us," says Mr. Plymire, "but, as we called at each tent, we told them there was nothing to fear. We were able to do considerable witnessing for the Master at this isolated camp. How good the Lord was in giving us this opportunity to tell of His love."

Now the caravan was heading north toward the Wang Tug tribe. Several days of riding across the trackless and uninhabited plateau brought them to the mighty snow-capped Nan Shan range. It was late afternoon when the expedition halted for camp. But at dawn the yaks were already loaded again and the long climb began. As they had done countless times before in order to bring the good news to isolated Tibetans, so again on this day the missionaries struggled to conquer another snow- and rock-littered ascent. The descent was difficult also, for it was so steep that the loads kept sliding off over the heads of the yaks.

Below the snows the caravan entered a forest. Here a few bear tracks were visible. Every now and then a silver-eared pheasant darted into the air and flew out of sight. The expedition camped at sunset by a rush-
ing stream along whose banks could be seen the black tents of the Wang Tugs.

“All about us were nomads,” records Mr. Plymire. “We worked in pairs so that we could call on each tent to give the message of salvation to every family.”

Before they had finished, the missionaries were visited by a delegation from the nearby Arig chief. Would they visit his tribe next?

In spite of the fact that the river was out of its banks, the animals were herded into the swift current and urged across, while the riders clung precariously to their saddles.

“We called at the chief’s tent and were well received,” reports the diary. “He told us that this was the first time a missionary had ever been to his tribe; and helped us in distributing our gospel literature from tent to tent.”

Bidding these Tibetan friends farewell, the missionaries recrossed the river and set out for an unknown tribe a few days’ journey to the east. The next day, Mr. Plymire spotted a lone rider approaching them from a distance. Peering through his field glasses he recognized him as the watchman he had left at the station. There could be only one reason for his appearance—trouble.
18. Dodging the Communists

The news the runner brought was most distressing. It concerned the Communists. They had already entered Northwest China and were nearing the Tibetan border. All foreign personnel had been ordered to evacuate immediately. Without delay, Mr. Plymire changed his course and the expedition headed south for Tangar.

As they recrossed the Nan Shan mountains and descended into the valley, the missionaries came upon some Tibetans camped by a small monastery. Even the guide had never heard of the place. Though they were so anxious to get home quickly, the missionaries were constrained to stop long enough to give the gospel witness to these lonely nomads. “God knew it was there and did not let it slip by,” commented Mr. Plymire.

On their arrival in Tangar, the Plymires quickly
gathered a few things together and left for Lanchow, seven days to the east. There they hoped to board a plane for Sian. Having gotten safely to Lanchow, however, they learned to their dismay that all air tickets had been sold out weeks in advance. No more were available to anyone.

Persistently, Mr. Plymire made one more call at the ticket office. The agent told him to come again later in the day, so late in fact that the missionary was sure the office would be closed. Nevertheless, he went at the appointed time. Much to his surprise he was presented with two tickets: one for Mrs. Plymire and the other for their small son, David. At least these two would be safe now, though it appeared that Mr. Plymire must remain in Lanchow and hope for the best. He bade his family good-bye and returned to the city, prepared to wait. One day, while wondering what he could do about the situation, he called on a friend who was already aware of his predicament. Surprisingly, this friend handed Mr. Plymire a ticket for Sian. He assured him that it was valid, so the missionary took it without examining it closely.

"Later in the day notice was sent giving the time for the departure of our plane," wrote Mr. Plymire. "The messenger handed me an envelope, but it had another man’s name on it. So I asked him for another ticket. He informed me that he had others but that this one was for me. I looked at my ticket and discovered that the name on it and the envelope were the same. Well, it must be mine though it was not my name. Later on I found that another man, by this name, had purchased a ticket for this plane but suddenly dropped dead. So I traveled on a dead man’s ticket."
The Communist army continued its march toward the Tibetan border. Swinging north, it passed through Kansu province, then moved east into northern Shensi. When nothing more happened, the tense situation relaxed. Thinking all was safe, the Plymires and the Woods returned to their respective stations and prepared to resume activities. Little did they realize that the apparent calm was but the lull before the storm.

Without warning, the Communists began a sudden offensive to gain control of the Northwest. Immediately the missionaries evacuated once more to Lanchow, hoping they would be safe there. But it was soon obvious to all that real trouble lay ahead. Nationalist troops now guarded all approaches to the city. Once anyone was inside he was not permitted to leave. Gun emplacements had been scattered along the city wall showing that the soldiers expected to have to defend the city against the oncoming Communists.

But the Communists had taken them off guard. Departing from the accepted methods of warfare, they were about to execute a coup which would almost capture the city—and the missionaries.

On the fateful day, Mr. Plymire was out walking the streets when he was abruptly approached by a total stranger. Without a word the man guided him to a spot where no one else could hear, whispering the information that a large number of Communists had already infiltrated the city. The battle for possession was to begin that night. As suddenly as he had appeared the man vanished.

Not long after darkness had crept across the troubled city, scattered gunfire began to echo through the night. The Communist vanguard inside the city had begun their stealthy offensive.
The soldiers on the walls were at a disadvantage. The moon shone brightly and they were plainly visible to the invaders who crouched with relative security in the shadowy streets below.

Within a few moments a violent battle was on. In deadly street fighting the Nationalist soldiers were attempting to oust the Communists.

As the missionaries gathered their families into a room where they would be safe, bullets went ricocheting off the walls and falling in the yard. The Christians were praying desperately that God would protect them from harm.

The battle continued all through the night, the two forces locked in a life-and-death combat. By three o'clock in the morning the government soldiers had finally gained control of the dangerous situation. The infiltrators vanished mysteriously, leaving behind some two hundred dead and many wounded.

The city was now out of immediate danger but martial law remained in effect. No one was allowed on the streets except to buy food. Soldiers patrolled the streets, ready to open fire on suspicious characters. Executions were carried out daily as the authorities captured the fifth columnists who were trying to hide after the Communists' failure to take the city.

Naturally the missionaries would like to get away from the entire danger area. Yet further waiting in Lanchow would be useless for there was no way for them to get to any place of real safety. So, in spite of the risks involved, the Plymires and the Woods resolved to return to their stations.

Without a travel permit, however, they could not hope to leave. While on his way to the permit office,
Mr. Plymire was again approached by an unknown man who seemed to know all about his problem.

"I know you want a travel permit," he said. "Follow me."

Turning in a different direction, the missionary followed the stranger to a heavily-guarded entrance which led into the army headquarters. He was taken to an officer who greeted him in a friendly manner.

"What can I do for you?"

"I need a permit to travel to Tangar," replied the missionary. "Would you be able to secure one for me?"

"Come back within three days," said the man, "and I will see what can be done."

Two days later Mr. Plymire was again taken before the same officer.

"Here is your permit," he announced, handing the valuable document to the missionary. "It will take you safely past every barrier all the way to Tangar."

Without delay the missionaries packed their belongings, hired two mule litters, and set out for their respective stations. A few miles west of Lanchow they came to the first road block.

"I know all about you," called the guard. "Go on!"

The same words greeted them at every barrier. God had gone ahead of them to remove each obstacle.

It was early 1937 before the missionaries were able to resume their activities. No sooner had they settled to the work at hand than a new threat developed: Japan and China were on the brink of war! This situation would most certainly place the future of missions in grave danger. It was clear that from now on the work of God would have to advance through storm.
19. Advance Through Storm

Into the gloomy picture shone a sweet ray of light for the Plymires. On April 17, 1937 they became the proud parents of a baby girl, Mary Ann. Her gentle baby ways were a bright contrast with the stark circumstances of missionary life on the far-inland station and brought no end of comfort to all.

The Japanese armies continued to advance and early in 1939 the missionaries received word that they should evacuate and depart for America before they became isolated. Again the Plymires prepared to accompany their fellow missionaries to a place of safety. At the last moment, however, a different thought came to them. Why not try to remain at their post? If it should become necessary to flee, could they not lose themselves in the interior of Tibet and find their way to India? So they stayed on.

Victor Plymire was now sixty years of age. He
viewed with alarm the darkening international picture, and doubted that he had many years left to work among his Tibetans. Therefore, early in 1941, the veteran missionary began preparations for another evangelistic expedition into Northeastern Tibet.

As usual, yaks would carry the tents and food supplies. However, there was a wagon trail clear to the final destination, so two carts were hired also. One was loaded with additional supplies. Rigged to resemble a covered wagon, the other would make a conveyance in which Mrs. Plymire and the children could ride.

Just before the journey was to begin, Mrs. Plymire developed a serious foot infection which caused her a great deal of distress. For his wife's sake, Mr. Plymire felt they should wait until the infection cleared up. But Mrs. Plymire was for starting out as planned. Therefore early in June the caravan left Tangar and headed up the gorge to the south.

While Mr. Plymire and the men rode along, the two wagons creaked and bounced over the uneven trail. The first night they camped in a valley at the foot of Sun Moon mountain. The next day the mountain would have to be scaled.

Moon and stars were still shining next morning as the tents were struck. Then, as the first rays of the morning sun broke over the mountains to the east, the caravan began the long climb. Except for the wagons all went well. The poor animals were simply too exhausted to pull them any farther. While the two teams were resting, the men came up with a brilliant idea. They hitched both teams to the same wagon and soon it was hauled up onto the pass. In about an hour the second one followed. But the
descent proved almost as great a problem as the climb. The wagons threatened to roll down the mountain out of control. Only by forcing heavy timbers against the wheels was disaster avoided.

They were traveling across the Ko Ko Nor plain, stopping to witness as opportunity afforded, when suddenly it began to rain. And it continued to rain. For days the missionaries and their men remained in tents waiting for the weather to clear. Cooking became a problem for there was no dry manure or brush to burn. During intervals between showers one of the party would scurry out in search of old roots or clods of manure that might have been sheltered from the downpour. It was a relief to all when, at the end of fourteen long days, the sun broke through. The expedition could travel on.

Camped in the mountains south of the lake, the missionaries learned of a new threat. A clan of people known as the Kazacks had been driven out of Sinkiang and were well into Northeastern Tibet. Because of their warlike nature they had immediately taken to killing and plundering. Mr. Plymire dismissed the information as rumor and led the caravan on.

The seriousness of the situation was revealed one morning, however, when the evangelistic expedition met a platoon of Moslem soldiers on foot. Had the missionaries or any of their men, they asked, seen a group of strange characters with a surplus of horses? Kazacks, they declared, had stolen their horses the night before.

In spite of the lurking dangers, Mr. Plymire insisted on forging ahead. They could run into trouble by turning back just as easily as by going on.

As they descended the mountains, moving out over
the barren Tsa Ka desert, lizards scurried from the path of the animals. Now and then a frightened rabbit dashed for shelter. A few Mongolians, who tried to make a living by raising goats or by renting camels, were the only human beings in sight. Yet even these lonely nomads were not neglected by the missionaries, who took pains to witness to each family.

Crossing the desert, the little caravan again entered the mountains. Early rains had washed out the road and the men must dismount to dig a path so the wagons could cross over. Drinking water became a problem also. No rain had fallen for some time in this area and the expedition must depend for water upon stagnant pools. The road here was undiscernible from the rest of the landscape and more than once the leader had to ride far ahead to scout out a path through the towering mountains.

At last the missionaries' patient plodding was rewarded. One bright morning, nestled at the foot of a high mountain and shrouded in a magnificent pine forest, they found the small and isolated monastery of Dulan—one of the most ancient in Tibet. They camped by a crystal stream and prepared to stay for a few days. They would witness to the many pilgrims who came daily for worship.

The local Tibetans claimed that the human race had its origin in this mysterious vale; yet they had never heard of the Christ who died to save them. How the missionaries thanked God that He had privileged them to be the ones to carry His gospel to this dark corner of Tibet!

Although there were still great opportunities beyond, at the end of two weeks the Plymires prepared for the return trip to Tangar. It was now late summer
and already snow was beginning to fall on the passes. They must be sure to be over the last pass before the snow became too deep for travel. And the Kazack menace was increasing.

One day while the expedition was encamped on the Tsa Ka plain again, Mr. Plymire noted a strange, skin-clad man with a pointed hat riding toward the camp on a cow! The stranger rode over to a hired hand who was tending the horses. After a short conversation he mounted his cow again and rode off over a low hill to the west.

Mr. Plymire called the hired man over to him and asked who the odd-looking fellow was and what he wanted.

"I believe he was a Kazack," the hired hand replied. "He wanted to know whom the horses belonged to, and how many guns we had."

"What did you tell him?"

"Oh, I told him that the horses belonged to soldiers, and that they had eighteen of the best guns, the kind that can kill many people."

"But that is not true. Why did you lie?" demanded the missionary.

"Well, I thought the man was a spy and I wanted to frighten him."

Before long a company of soldiers began pitching their tents nearby. The missionary walked over for a chat with the new arrivals. He learned that the soldiers were out to capture a small band of Kazacks which had been troubling the area for several days. So far they had been unsuccessful.

Very early the next morning, Mr. Plymire felt impressed to strike his tents and load the animals for a move. About midmorning the caravan was on the
march again, westward. It had covered a scant two miles when the desert stillness was suddenly shattered by rifle shots.

Mr. Plymire jumped from his horse and crawled to the top of a nearby hill. Looking through his field glasses, he made out a horrifying sight. On the very spot where he had been camped a battle was in progress. A band of Kazacks had appeared, seemingly from nowhere, and had opened fire on the soldiers. For several minutes the two sides fought furiously. In the end the well-armed soldiers proved more than a match for their foes. How thankful the missionary was that he had followed the urging of the Spirit and struck camp when he did!

Back in Tangar again, the missionaries had cause for rejoicing over the results of their efforts in that city. The most outstanding incident was the healing of Mr. Chang.

Mr. Chang had first come to the mission seeking medical help for his hip. It had been dislocated in a fall from a horse. Local practitioners—having little knowledge of human anatomy—had simply given him a hypodermic shot, which at that time was considered a cure-all for human ailments. By the time the poor man came to the Plymires for help, the bones had set in their dislocated positions. Very little could be done to help the man physically but the missionary did succeed in leading the man to Christ.

A few days later, Mr. Chang hobbled down to the river to take part in the baptismal service. A motley crowd of onlookers had gathered—some out of curiosity, others to mock.

When the cripple's turn came he had to be helped down the steep bank into the water, leaving his walk-
ing stick behind. After he had been immersed, he stood for a moment as if wondering what to do. Without thinking, he waded back, unaided, to the water's edge. For a brief instant no one paid any attention. Then, as the people saw Mr. Chang climbing up the bank without help, they were filled with wonder. Mr. Chang looked down at his old walking stick and smiled as he realized that he could walk normally without it.

The assembled Christians were now praising God, joyful for this evidence of His miracle-working power. Those who had gathered to mock went away shaking their heads.

Victories were not won in Tangar without persecution, however. The missionaries had not realized the severity of the persecution until one day, No Ga the Tibetan called on them, a troubled look on his copper-tanned face. Having motioned him aside, they asked him what the trouble was.

"The village elders are building a shrine on the hill-top for the protection of the community. Everybody is expected to take part in the construction so that the gods will not be offended. So they asked me to help too," explained No Ga.

"And what did you do?" asked Mr. Plymire.

"I told them I was a Christian and could not help them," No Ga replied.

"Then what happened?"

"The elders said I was making the gods angry and that I would be held responsible for any evil which might come on us. When I still refused to help, they tied me to a post and beat me."

The missionaries listened in silence as No Ga continued.

"After they beat me I still would not do as they
wished. Then my brother-in-law, who is a very cruel man, told me that if I did not help to build the shrine he would kill me."

"What can I do to help you?" questioned the missionary, deeply concerned for the young man's safety.

"I do not want help," answered the brave Tibetan. "I just wanted to tell you. I am not afraid. I know Jesus will be with me."

Bidding the Plymires good-bye, No Ga returned to his home in the mountains. Several days later the missionaries received word that the young Tibetan was ill. Immediately they sent one of the old Christians to visit No Ga. He was to help him and bring back a report as soon as possible. The messenger returned that same day with the good news that No Ga was no longer ill. He did have a cold, he said, but would be coming to see the Plymires at the mission within a day or two.

But on that very day No Ga's brother-in-law had left the village on a secret errand. Later in the afternoon he was seen in a fur trapper's supply store buying animal poison. He stuffed the deadly powder in the folds of his sheepskin robe and returned to the village at dusk.

After dark he called on No Ga and pretended to sympathize with him about his cold. Going out to the kitchen he prepared a bowl of hot tea. Stealthily he drew the packet from the folds of his garment and emptied the contents into the tea. Then he brought the deadly liquid to No Ga. The unsuspecting man thanked his brother-in-law and drank every drop.

In a few moments faithful No Ga lay still in death. He had paid the supreme price for his faith in Christ. Were human eyes capable of beholding the invisible,
they might have seen the soul of No Ga, the Tibetan Christian, taking its flight upward past the hills and above the snow-enshrouded mountains. Now, beyond all suffering and danger, he stood in the presence of the One he loved more than life itself. And he could stand there unashamed, for he had been faithful unto death.

By the time the Plymires learned of No Ga’s death, the body had already been buried. And had it not been for his brother-in-law’s confession, the death would have always remained a mystery.

But God had seen—and remembered. Not long after No Ga’s death, deep, angry sores broke out all over the brother-in-law’s body. His superstitious heart, aided by his guilty conscience, convinced him that he was being punished by No Ga’s God. Fearing even greater retribution, he ordered his wife to burn a peace-offering at the grave so that No Ga’s spirit would be appeased and the anger of his God turned away. But there was no answer. His condition grew steadily worse until the frightened man was beside himself.

He sent his wife to a sorcerer to inquire if there was any hope of his recovery. She returned with the word that he would be dead within so many days! In desperation he inquired of another sorcerer who, by the strange operation of evil powers, gave him exactly the same reply as had the first one.

Frantically, the killer tried to think of some way to undo the damage. At last he came to the conclusion that he must go to the missionary and confess his awful sin. With great difficulty he made the ten-mile trip to Tangar. He arrived at the mission station in a terrible state of mind and body. Even before Mr. Ply-
No Ga—the Tibetan martyr who was faithful unto death.

Ga Zong and his family, Tibetan Christians who lived in the mountains about ten miles from Tangar.
The missionary caravan camped within sight of the Ancient Monastery of Dulan, one of the oldest in Tibet.

Preparing supper on the high Tibetan plateau. In the background stands the covered wagon in which Mrs. Plymire and the children rode.
Traders and their caravans camped outside Tangar. The gospel was given personally to these and other traders who came to the city.

The four converts baptized by Mr. Plymire before he left for America in 1944.
mire could help the man into a comfortable bed, he began to pour out the whole sordid story.

"Why did you do it?" asked the missionary.

"No Ga would not help us build the shrine," was the only answer.

Having relieved his mind, the brother-in-law still refused to humble himself and trust in Christ to take away his great sin. He returned to his home more hardened than ever. His physical suffering increased in intensity until his death. The gruesome night of his passing there occurred a most terrifying manifestation. Those standing about the dying man claim that they heard demons pounding on the window. Mysterious voices called out of the darkness: "We have come to take you to hell!" With a wild scream the wretched man, now in the very clutches of Satan, went out into everlasting darkness.

No Ga's blood was avenged!

In June, 1943, as Mrs. Plymire was returning from a visit to a small monastery, she sustained a sudden and almost fatal heart attack. Immediately her husband called the local Christians together for prayer. He had learned through years of blessed experience how effectively these dear ones could pray in times of trouble. His beloved wife must be delivered!

The faithful Christians poured out their hearts in intercessory prayer; and God heard their cry. Soon a noticeable change took place. Mrs. Plymire was now able to move about without too much effort. However, it was plain that eleven years of hard work without sufficient rest had taken their toll.

Though the decision was a difficult one to make, there was no alternative: Mrs. Plymire and the children must return to the United States. Her husband
would remain on the field until a later date. He took his beloved family as far as Chung King, the wartime capital of China, where he placed them on a plane bound for India.

Once again Victor Plymire was alone in Tangar. This time, however, he had the consolation that his family was safe and well cared for. The letters which came and went helped to soften the trial.

"One came forward for salvation today," he wrote on August 20, 1944. Again on the 30th:

"After service I baptized four believers in the river. The Lord did bless us: a short but happy time. Lord, keep these new converts true!"

Unable to venture out on preaching trips, Mr. Plymire still had the pleasure of entertaining many of the nomads in his home. And his love for the Tibetans often made him long for an opportunity to take the gospel across the mountains. Years of patient labor and much prayer had opened wide the doors of a once closed land; but alas! there was no one to enter. Mr. Plymire expressed the burden of his heart in a letter to friends at home:

"Our work moves along during these trying times. Results are what we long to see, and surely there are more to follow. During the summer we have had many Tibetans here from Jey Kun Do. These have just left for their homes. We have preached the gospel to many. We also gave them the printed Word: Testaments and scripture portions to take with them. A few asked for extra copies to give to their priests.

"The door to Tibet is open. Shall we, or shall we not, go forward? I look in through this door with a heart burdened for these perishing souls. Earnestly pray that the Lord will send forth laborers..."
To his wife he wrote:

"Why is the door open? Surely to enter! Laborers must not have obeyed the Lord's call, or there would be some entering this open door."

Perhaps he could arouse greater interest by presenting personally the need of Tibet to friends in the home land! Victor Plymire decided to return to the United States.

He met with the Christians for the last time, on Sunday, September 3rd. As he looked over the small congregation, his eyes rested on old Mrs. Yen, happy in the Lord though living in poverty. And there was Mrs. Ku, the blind lady, clutching the same gnarled walking stick that had guided her to church these many years. Her physical eyes might be sightless but her spiritual vision had often beheld the glories of Christ. At the rear of the church sat the old Tibetan who had ridden alone for nine days to warn the missionaries of impending danger. He was a good Christian. His wife, too, was a witness to the transforming power of Christ.

What would become of these faithful ones? Who would stand by them in the days ahead?

When at the close of the service, the missionary ministered the communion to each of the believers, he felt assured that they truly knew the meaning of fellowship with Christ.

The following Saturday was his day of departure. Gathering the few Christians about him, Mr. Plymire spoke a word of encouragement to each. There were the natural emotions as he committed these faithful followers to God's care. He knew that some would not be present when he returned; yet he assured them all that he had no thought but to come back as soon as
possible. There was a final word of exhortation and then the missionary climbed into a hired cart. At the crack of the whip the animals strained at the harness, and the veteran messenger of the Cross started on the long journey toward America. Mr. Plymire was beginning his first furlough in almost thirteen years!

In a few moments the cart had rounded a hillock, hiding the city of Tangar from view.
20. Last Furlough

At Hsi Ning, forty miles east of Tangar, Mr. Plymire hired a mule litter. The one-hundred-and-fifty-mile trip to Lanchow would require several slow and wearying days. At the end of day one the diary comments on traveling expenses:

"Dinner $80.00, supper $20.00, and $30.00 for lodging." This would seem to be rather high living for a missionary, but inflation was responsible. Figured in terms of United States currency, the total would not be more than $2.00!

These were war days and that fact made travel both tedious and dangerous. At Lanchow there was a wait of three weeks before a plane was available to Chungking. After a six-day stopover in that ancient city, the missionary boarded a plane destined for Calcutta, India.

The big plane touched down at Kunming and did
not resume flight until the sun was low in the western sky. A considerable portion of the distance would be flown over Japanese-occupied territory and it would not pay to take chances. The famous "Hump," a rugged mountain mass feared by all fliers because of its treacherous down-drafts and icing conditions, was an added danger. This sky hazard had strewn the wreckage of more than one plane across the forbidding mountain slopes.

From the plane window Mr. Plymire watched the shadows creep across the lowlands and foothills until darkness enveloped all but the highest peaks, scintillating in the rays of the setting sun. Slowly the snowy heights changed from dazzling white to pale pink as the last rays of light lingered, then slipped below the horizon. Another night had closed in on the land of Tibet.

During the long flight, as the missionary crossed over high above the towering ranges, he could not but think of the hours and days he had spent struggling up the slopes on the other side of the same mountains, plodding through deep snows to bring the good news of salvation. Had the choice been left to him, he would still be there.

From Calcutta the missionary took the train to Bombay, where he made final preparations to sail for the United States.

The five-week voyage was rough. Then on the afternoon of January 6, 1945, Victor Plymire saw the shores of his native land for the first time in almost thirteen years. What were his thoughts? Were they of rest? No! Rest would come only when his work was finished. Nor was America his home. Home was where his
heart was—in the mountains of Tibet. Already he was planning for his return.

The missionary had waited many years for other missionaries to join him in the great task of evangelizing among the nomad Tibetans. The response had been so inadequate! Now he was in America once more, and once more he would endeavor to present the spiritual needs of his beloved Tibet to his friends in the homeland. The intensity of his activities is evident from the January 9th entry in his diary:

"Brother Voget took me to the Bible College. Here I spoke at 8:15; and then had altogether five different meetings up till 1:00 a.m. Surely did enjoy the time here. But tired."

What a joyous reunion the missionary had with his family! Then, indeed, he took a few weeks off for a much deserved rest. How David and Mary had grown! And praise God that Mrs. Plymire was so much improved in health. Surely the heavenly Father had been mindful of His own!

Soon, however, the restless messenger was on the road again, traveling from church to church in the hope that something more could be done to stir interest in the great unoccupied territories of Northwest China and Tibet. Perhaps, in answer to the call of God, there would be young people ready to go to these far-off places.

Mr. Plymire was very conscious that he had only a few years remaining in which to serve his Lord. It had been his lot patiently to carve a trail across the forbidden land of Tibet. After lonely years of hard work and earnest prayer, he had seen the doors of that land swing open wide. But now others would
have to go to enter those doors. Oh, that they could hear the pleading voice of Ga Lo:

"Come and tell us more! Have you found anyone to take your place so you can come to live with us?" And Ga Lo's cry was only the echo of an even louder cry arising from the many encampments nestled in long shadows under the towering mountains of a neglected land.

But Victor Plymire was to be disappointed again. Though he pleaded for workers in church after church, it finally became obvious that no one was interested. He could report only a few conversions on the field. Had this discouraged those who might have thought of going? Were Tibet's mysterious mountains too imposing a barrier? Whatever the reason, it was now apparent that the one who had already climbed so far would have to go the rest of the way alone.

The Plymires planned that this would be their last furlough. They intended to remain on the mission field, living out their remaining days for those they loved. During the summer of 1946 they itinerated in preparation for their return to Tangar. And at last, on February 14, 1947, in company with other missionaries, they sailed from San Francisco, aboard the Marine Lynx.

(Many missionaries had returned to China soon after the close of the war. A few had gone to outposts in the most remote areas. James Vigna had already arrived at his station near Labrang, a great Tibetan monastery. The veteran and pioneer, W. W. Simpson, though almost eighty years of age, was back in Northwest China where he had already spent fifty years.)

With the Plymires were the Woods, who intended to resume missionary activities in Northwest China. All
on board were driven by a great sense of urgency. Time was running out. As they disembarked in Shanghai the missionaries separated for their various tasks. Few had so far yet to go as the Plymires and the Woods.

The war had completely devastated the inland roads of China, so that, oddly enough, air freight was the most economical as well as the most convenient method of transportation. In years gone by the thirteen-hundred-mile trip to Lanchow had taken eight weeks. This time the missionaries flew, with their baggage, in as many hours!

The remaining one hundred and fifty miles to Hsi Ning would not be as easy. Three trucks were hired for the journey. They had gone but twenty miles when the convoy ground to a stop. The road was completely blocked by a mass of dirt and huge rocks which had tumbled down from the mountain during the night. There was no way around; for on one side was the sheer cliff, on the other side the ravine where, thirty feet below, the Yellow River boiled along through the narrow confines of the gorge.

With the aid of long poles, the missionaries and their Chinese "chauffeurs" pried loose the largest rocks and rolled them into the river. Two or three times everyone had to run for cover as more rocks and earth came cascading down from above. Eventually a passable way was cleared and one by one the trucks crawled through.

About eighty miles east of Hsi Ning the convoy entered upon the harrowing thirty-mile stretch known as "Old Duck Gorge." For the entire distance there are only sheer cliffs on one side of the narrow road and on the other, far below, a foaming river.
All went well until the convoy began a steep climb on a very sharp curve. The outer edge of the curve had been braced with heavy timbers so that it would be wide enough for trucks. What if the timbers gave way? Everyone held his breath as the first truck labored up the incline. What if it stalled and rolled back? As if in answer, the motor sputtered and died. Trying desperately to avoid disaster, the driver wrenched the front wheels around and jammed the truck bed against the cliff. It was a close call. The outside tire was hanging out over nothing!

Regaining his composure, the “chauffeur” eased the truck away from the edge and drove it onto a level spot. Everyone got off to relieve his nerves.

“I will never come over this road again,” declared the harried driver as he mopped the sweat from his brow.

From Hsi Ning the Woods left for Kuei Teh, a town about three days south of Hsi Ning. The Plymires went on to Tangar.

At last they were back among the people who were so close to their hearts! And what a warm welcome they were accorded by the Christians and old friends!
The work had not progressed during their absence as the Plymires had hoped it would. Many of the Christians, they discovered, had moved away. Some of the faithful ones had died. A few had returned to their old ways.

The missionaries renewed their efforts and the situation slowly improved. There were still the faithful ones who had gathered each evening for prayer while the Plymires had been away. And there were the two dependable deacons. Attendance at the services began to increase.

And this time the people seemed to have a different attitude toward the missionaries' message. The far-reaching effects of a great world war had taught them a lesson. They had looked to their ancient gods to bring them relief in the hour of crisis. But the ancient
gods had failed them. Now they were searching elsewhere for the answer.

Especially conscious of the failure of the old philosophies to provide answers to their inquiring minds were the young people. Young men, in the prime of life, were eager to test the reality of the gospel. If Christ were a real person, interested in the present problems of Oriental young people, they wanted to test His Way of Life. Something in their own hearts told them that this new teaching was Truth.

This interest in spiritual values had developed none too soon. Another philosophy was gaining in popularity with many of the most promising of Asia’s youth. Communism was beginning to spread. Its purpose was the subjection of a great people to a system of thought which would shake the very foundations of their way of life. In this race against atheistic Communism, the missionaries drove themselves to even greater efforts to build a lasting witness to the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In order to reach as many as possible with the gospel, almost continuous meetings were conducted during the summer of 1948. The aged pioneer, Rev. W. W. Simpson, came to conduct evangelistic meetings. Morning, noon, and night he preached. During that week one could sense in the very air a feeling of expectancy, as hearts reached out toward Christ.

The new congregation consisted not alone of the poor and unlearned—welcome as they were. Now there were merchants, tradesmen, teachers, and men of position, genuinely hungry for spiritual reality. With clear understanding and truly penitent hearts, not a few answered the call to salvation.

Pastor Chin and an evangelist, two Chinese men of
God, arrived later in the fall to assume the responsibility of the local church. Pastor Chin was particularly used of God in praying for the sick.

Though trained and educated to merit the title of scholar, Pastor Chin's deep humility was the most outstanding trait of his character. When he gave the altar call, he never failed to make it clear that those who responded were not to attempt *self*-reform; they were to acknowledge that they were sinners coming to Christ and, confessing their evil deeds, to plead for pardon.

An illustration of this occurred one day when Pastor Chin finished his sermon. As he extended the invitation to those who wished to accept Christ as Saviour, three men arose and made their way to the edge of the platform. Two of them were recent converts. They explained that the third man was their friend and that he wished to become a Christian. The man was well dressed and obviously proud. But Pastor Chin was no respecter of persons. Requesting the proud man to kneel, he instructed him to repeat after him the prayer of a sinner coming to Christ.

In a voice which could be heard by the entire congregation, Pastor Chin led out in prayer, pausing at the end of each sentence to make sure that the penitent was repeating after him the same words: "O Lord, I am a sinner," he began, "wretched and filthy in your sight. My sins are many. I have nothing to boast of. My own righteousnesses are as filthy rags. I am unworthy even to come to you, O Lord, but forgive my sins and wash me in the blood of Jesus. Amen."

Whatever self-esteem the repenting man might have had was considerably lessened by this time.

The Tangar congregation continued to increase until at least two hundred and fifty persons were attend-
ing the Sunday services. Evening services were conducted each night and were well attended by outsiders. It was common for conversions to take place in these meetings.

Four young men in particular were gloriously converted. No sooner had they been saved than they came to the Plymires to announce that they were dedicating themselves to the preaching of the gospel. Would the missionaries help to train them? There was no asking for material assistance. In fact, they made it clear that they would be responsible for their own needs. All they desired was that they be allowed to come to the chapel every day for instruction. Could anyone accuse these earnest young fellows of being "rice Christians"?

It was indeed a triumph for the gospel. However, the triumph was well-nigh a tragedy. How much more effective the missionaries' efforts could have been if they had had a small training center for such dedicated young men as these. Through the years they had tried to establish one but funds were never available. The mission board did its best but the amounts they could provide were never adequate for this great need.

So it was that when the opportunity of a lifetime presented itself, the missionaries could offer only something quite insufficient for the demands of the hour. However, they were glad to do all that they could.

What of the work among the Tibetans? Though this door, too, was still wide open, it was evident that Mr. Plymire's days of laboring for and loving these nomads of the north were coming to an end. How he wished that he had forty years more to devote to them!

If only there were a little more time! If only someone would come to help! The missionary remembered
a young couple in America who had stated their desire to work at the Tangar mission station so that the Plymires could go on into the interior. However, before they would give a final affirmative to come they had written to inquire more about the living conditions. The missionaries' reply must have daunted their courage for they had never been heard from again.

Well, then, the Plymires would do what they could. At least they would visit once again the great monastery at Kum Bum. Thousands of pilgrims and worshipers would be there for the season's religious ceremonies. As the Plymires and the Woods approached this stronghold of heathenism, the gold roofs flashed as defiantly as ever in the rays of the winter sun.

But at least the years of patient toil had broken down the walls of suspicion and hatred. Forty years ago Mr. Plymire had been driven from this very spot. Now, as he stood witnessing to the Tibetans and distributing gospel literature, he knew he had nothing to fear. He climbed the steps to the chanting hall where he waited for the priests to emerge. One of the first to come out was a chief priest. Catching sight of the missionary, he walked over to him and, throwing an arm across his shoulder, welcomed his old friend, the white man, back to the monastery.

As Mr. Plymire walked past one of the gold-roofed temples, he stopped to talk with an old Tibetan beggar who had been sitting in the shadow of that shining roof as long as he could remember. Blind from birth, the old man had known nothing but extreme poverty all of his miserable life. Through the years he had sat there, depending on the doubtful generosity of passers-by. Perhaps someone might drop a coin or a
crust of bread into the small wooden bowl lying in the dust before him.

Life had indeed been unkind to him, yet this man had not forgotten his responsibility to the gods. In one hand he held a prayer wheel which he twirled incessantly.

"Will you sell me your prayer wheel," suggested Mr. Plymire, thinking that the peculiar object might be of interest to friends in America.

"Make an offer," replied the old man without missing a turn.

"Would five dollars be enough?" asked the missionary.

"No," came the quick reply.

"Ten dollars?"

"Not sufficient."

Wishing to see how far the old Tibetan would go, Mr. Plymire finally offered him the large sum of forty silver dollars. Undoubtedly this was more than the poor fellow had seen in all his life. For once he could have a decent meal. For the first time in his life he could afford warm lodging, instead of the bitterly cold corner in which he huddled. All he had to do was to sell his prayer wheel.

The missionary waited quietly for the old man to answer.

Raising his sightless eyes to the bargainer, the beggar ceased for the moment to turn his wheel. "I would not sell you my prayer wheel, no, not for anything. Keep your money, sir. If I accepted your offer, one day the money would be gone. Then what would I do? As long as I live and have strength, I shall continue my prayers to the gods. That matters more than all of the money you could offer me."
Pastor Chin—fearless Christian and faithful minister.
Some of the thirty-five new converts baptized in June 1949, shortly before the Plymires left Tangar.
To the right sits the old Tibetan beggar who refused to sell his prayer wheel for fear it might displease his gods.

Tonkyr Gonpa, the small monastery where Mr. Plymire made his last contact with the Tibetans on April 20, 1949.
So saying, he resumed the turning of his wheel, leaving the missionary deep in thought.

Could it be that simply to please gods who had never done anything for him, a man, living in poverty such as an American could hardly imagine, would reject an opportunity like this? Mr. Plymire's mind recalled the desperate appeals he had made in America for the cause of the gospel in Tibet. Many a time he had gone from the church he was visiting with barely enough from the offering to cover his traveling expenses to the next church. Time after time his call for help had fallen on deaf ears.

*Must it always be the pagans who have the most dedicated hearts?*

Spring came, and with it disturbing rumors that the Communist revolution was meeting with success. Were these the final days of grace? Might the doors of China and Tibet soon close to missionary effort perhaps forever?

Not wanting to give up, the Plymires considered the possibility of remaining in Tibet even if, and when, the Communist regime should come to power. In view of what might transpire to make missionary work impossible eventually, what did God want them to do now?

It was on April 19, 1949 that Victor Plymire made his last effort to reach the unreached Tibetans. He journeyed eighteen miles to the south, to the little monastery at Tonkyr. It lies in a valley at the foot of a mountain. A crowd of nomads had gathered from a wide area to attend the ceremonies. On hand to welcome the missionary was an old Tibetan friend, who had a room prepared and ready for his visitor.

Though it was April the weather was still very cold.
Snow covered the nearby mountaintops; the stream flowing past the monastery was frozen over in several places. The missionary's room was unheated. But he was oblivious to all this. He was among his Tibetans.

A day later the missionary was sitting in his room eating a little lunch when a burly Tibetan walked in. He was bare-chested, having wrapped his sheepskin robe about his waist. The usual long sword swung from his old cloth girdle. Though advanced in years, the man was a specimen of health.

As they conversed, Mr. Plymire attempted to direct the conversation into spiritual channels. Quite simply he told the man of God's love for him, and of Christ's death to save him.

The old Tibetan listened intently. With a deep sigh he shook his head.

"I cannot comprehend. I cannot understand. My mind is too old and dark. Had someone told me this when I was younger, I believe I could have understood. But now I am old. It is of no use for you to tell me any more."

Slowly the man turned and walked away.

The missionary would never forget those tragic words. They were not the words of just one man; they were the voice of Tibet: "Had you come sooner... But now I am old... My mind is too dark..."

The evening of his last day at the monastery, Mr. Plymire walked outside the main entrance to watch the sun set over the mountains to the west. The snowy peaks seemed to lift themselves into the rays of the golden sun like emblems of purity above a dark and sinful land.

He turned back and the monastery entrance stood open wide. The monastery: symbol of spiritual dark-
ness where he had entered and fought face to face with the enemy of Tibetan souls. Darkness was creeping in now over the valleys, even over the mountains. But the door was still open! Not just the monastery gate—the door to Tibet! After the veteran missionary finally had been forced to lay down his task, would there be no one to enter that door?

When Mr. Plymire returned to Tangar he learned that the American consul had sent word advising the missionaries to consider their future in the light of the inevitable Communist conquest. The Plymires still hoped against hope that that conquest would not mean the end of their labors in Tibet. However, since David and Mary were ready to continue their schooling elsewhere, their father and mother decided to accompany them to the coast. Perhaps afterward they could return to Tangar again.

It was well that the missionaries could not see the future. The present was filled with victory. During these last years at Tangar they had witnessed the greatest ingathering of souls in their entire ministry among Tibetans.

A final service was held on Sunday, June 19, 1949. The climax came when after the time of worship, twenty-five new converts were baptized in the river. To witness these precious believers making their public stand for Christ, seemed a fitting close to a lifetime of dedicated labor.

The next morning final preparations for departure were completed. Yesterday, the local Christians and other friends had paid public tribute to the man and his wife who had won their respect and love over the years. Today there was very little conversation. Hearts were too full to speak.
Though no one voiced his fears, each felt that this was probably the last time they would look upon the faces of their beloved missionary and his wife. Perhaps none was so aware of this as Victor Plymire himself, who went slowly about the last minute duties as if trying to linger just a little longer. Did he know he was bidding Tibet farewell?

It was raining as the missionaries climbed into the truck. Christians and friends had gathered round to say the last good-byes to two people who held a place in their hearts which no others ever had. As the truck pulled away, they shouted with one voice,

"Peace be with you!"

Outside the city the truck was hailed by an old man who stood atop a high place by the roadside.

"Peace be with you, pastor!" he called as loud as he could and waved his arm in farewell.

The old man was a Tibetan who had been converted years before. He walked ten miles down from the mountains just to have the privilege of calling out those five words from his heart. Thus were the missionaries reminded once again that their labor of love had not been in vain.

As the city of Tangar dropped from view, the missionary thought of other Tibetans who had believed unto eternal life. There was the old priest. There was No Ga, the faithful, lying in an unmarked grave on a lonely Tibetan mountainside. He had gone all the way. And Ka Zong, his elder brother and his wife — they too had followed Christ to the end. What of Chepell, who just after his conversion had returned to his tribe, only to be murdered by his own people?

Looking backward from the crest of a hill, Victor
Plymire could see the mountains he had faced when he came to Tangar almost forty years ago. He had determined to conquer those mountains, to go beyond them with the gospel. With God's help he had done it.
22. Climbing Toward the Summit

Events developed swiftly. While the Plymires were waiting in Hong Kong, word was received that the Communist armies had carried their conquest to the Tibetan border. The city of Tangar was taken on September 12. Well aware of the new government's attitude toward Christian missionaries, the Plymires decided that it would be wiser not to return. Their presence at the mission station would only cause trouble for the Christians. With heavy hearts they prepared to leave for the United States.

Following their arrival, they took up residence in Springfield, Missouri. While Mrs. Plymire assumed the responsibilities of the home, her husband resumed his activities on behalf of missions. He must place Tibet before the people. How could he forget the land where his heart was? Again and again he would repeat the words:
“There is no place I would rather be than among the Tibetans!”

Always there was the hope that some day he could return to Tibet. Victor Plymire lived for that day, and died living for it. More than anything else he wanted to be crossing those bleak mountains in search of Tibetans, wandering and lost, without hope.

On more than one occasion, after others had retired for the night, a suppressed sob would break the silence of the little bedroom, followed by the almost inaudible words, “O Lord, remember the Tibetans!” It was an expression of the burden he carried for a people he could no longer help, except in prayer.

The last missionary meeting in which he took part was a convention in Sikeston, Missouri. It was a missionary rally, the night of November 30th. As each missionary was introduced he was asked to present the needs of his field. Mr. Plymire was the last one called upon and was also asked to make the appeal before the offering was taken.

Dressed in his Tibetan costume, the aging missionary stepped forward to begin his remarks. How happy he seemed as he quoted John 3:16 in the Tibetan language! He finished his message with these words:

“When I walk the streets up There, there will be those who will take me by the hand—those to whom we have taken the message in the regions beyond.”

On the morning of December 8, 1956, Mr. Plymire sat at the kitchen table. He was reading the same beloved Bible he had taken with him thirty years before on the bitter trek across Tibet. On the flyleaf he had penned these words:

“This is my road map, the King’s highway. There are no side routes, only one unmistakable path.”
How often he had consulted that road map! It had guided him over life's highest passes and through its darkest valleys. In a short while he would no longer need it.

Late that afternoon he entered his room and sat on the edge of his bed. The far-away look in his eyes spoke of a heart that was still yearning for lost souls in the Tibetan mountains.

But Victor Plymire would not climb any more mountains on this earth. Instead he had begun to ascend a loftier summit than this world knows.

No longer now is the missionary hemmed in by the walls of that tiny bedroom. The scene seems to have changed. Above a bleak landscape there towers an unusually rugged and lofty peak. A lone figure is climbing toward the summit. Up and up he mounts. With one final struggle he reaches the jagged height and stands erect, silhouetted in the rays of the setting sun. He pauses for one fleeting moment.

Looking away into the haze ahead, he can see the shadowy vale of death's dark valley. But before he descends to take that way, the climber looks backward to the mountains of mystery over which he had crossed into the unknown. There he had walked out of the jaws of death, pressing on beyond the last barrier to accomplish his Master's mission. Again, as he listens, he can hear the shouts of bandit hordes as they mingle with the cries of their victims through that awful reign of terror. Undismayed he climbs steadily on, even though his strength is waning. Now he advances victoriously through life's last great storm. All tragedies are in the past!

Around the climber moans a chilling wind. He minds it not; for he hears it echo God's lifetime prom-
ise: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee: yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness."

Not once has that promise failed. Through grave dangers, seen and unseen, the One who made the promise has walked by his side—for almost fifty years has guided him over the trail of selfless service which led ever upward. For Victor Plymire the climb has been long and hard. Now it is over.

His last words were addressed to his faithful companion who had climbed the mountains with him, "I'm just talking to the Lord." In a few moments the sun had set. The missionary's labors were finished.

They laid his body to rest in Greenlawn cemetery in Springfield, Missouri. But Victor Plymire is not there. He is on the summit of glory—with No Ga, Chepell, and Ka Zong. He is again among his beloved Tibetans—Tibetans who are redeemed unto God because one lone white man was willing to lighten their darkness and show them the trail to the Eternal Summit.

THE END